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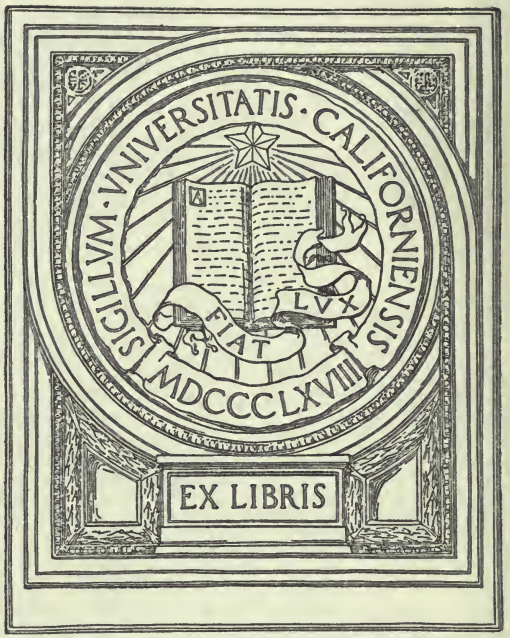
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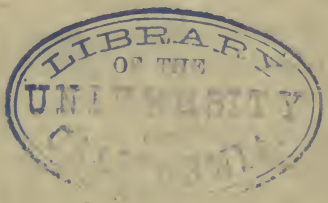
THE TOWER OF PERCEMONT.

By

GEORGE SAND.



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THE TOWER OF PERCEMONT.

CHAPTER I.

It was during my vacation, in the autumn of 1873. that I first became connected with the De Nives family, I possessed at that time an annual income of about thirty thousand francs, acquired as much by my professional labor as a barrister in the royal court as by the assiduous and patient improvement of the real estate of Madame Chantebel, my wife. My only son, Henri, had just finished his law-studies at Paris, and I was expecting him the very evening that the following note reached me by hand : —

" *To M. Chantebel, barrister, at the Maison-Blanche, commune of Percemont, Riom.*

" Sir : May I ask for your legal advice ? I know that it is your vacation, but I will come to your country-house to-morrow, if you are willing to receive me.

" Alix, Countess de Nives.

" Please reply by bearer."

I replied that I should expect the countess on the

following day, and my wife immediately began to find fault with me. "You always reply at once in the same fashion," she said, "and never allow any one to urge you or wait for you, just as a briefless barrister would do. You never will know how to make the most of your position!"

"My position? What is my position, please tell me?"

"You have the highest legal standing in the districte Your fortune is made, and it is high time for you to take a little rest."

"That will soon come I hope; but until our son has commenced the practice of his profession, and shown that he is able to take my place, I do not intend to endanger the situation. I wish to install him with every chance of success."

"You always talk in this way; you have a mania for business, and are never willing to refuse a case. You will die in harness. Come let us see! Suppose Henri has not the ability to take your place?"

"Then, as I promised, I will retire and end my days in the country; but Henri *will* take my place. He is a good scholar; he is well endowed—"

"But he has not your physical strength and your determined will. He is delicate. He takes after me."

"We shall see! If the work is too much for him, I shall make a consulting barrister of him, under my direction. I am sufficiently well known and appreciated to be certain that practice will not be wanting."

"Well and good, I should like that better. A consulting lawyer can give his opinion without leaving his home, and while living on his estate."

"Yes at my age, with my reputation and experience; but this will not do for a young man. He must live in the city, and even go to see his clients. It will be advis-

able, during the first years of professional duty, that I should be near at hand in order to direct him."

"That is just like you! you do not wish to retire! Then of what use is it to purchase a chateau and go to the expense of making it habitable, if neither of you will live there?"

My wife had recently induced me to purchase the manor house of Percemont, situated in the very middle of our estate, in the commune of the same name. This territory, within the enclosure of our land, had been a source of trouble to us for a long time, and we desired very much to become its owners; but the old Baron Coras de Percemont valued his ancestral manor house at an exorbitant price, and determined to make the purchaser pay dear for the honor of restoring its ruins. We had given up the idea of possessing it, when the baron died without children, and the chateau, having been put up at auction, was knocked down to us for a reasonable sum. At least thirty thousand francs were required to render this nest of vultures, perched on the summit of a volcanic cone, barely habitable, and I was by no means so eager as my wife to incur such an expense. Our country house, spacious, neat, convenient, sheltered by hills, and surrounded by an extensive garden, appeared to me altogether sufficient, and our acquisition had no other merit in my eyes than that of possibly freeing us from an inconvenient and mischief-making neighbor. The declivities of the rocks on which the Tower of Percemont stood were well planted in vines. The summit, crowned with a growth of young fir-trees, might hereafter become a good cover for game, and I intended, if it were left undisturbed, to have there an enjoyable preserve for shooting in time to come. My wife did not take the same view of the case. This great tower had disordered her brain. It seemed to her that,

in perching herself there, she raised her social level five hundred feet above the level of the sea. Women have their whims; mothers have their weaknesses. Henri had always manifested so strong a desire to possess Percemont that Madame Chantebel gave me no respite until I had bought it.

Almost the first words she said to Henri, while embracing him, upon his arrival, when I had only been two days in full possession of my new property, were, "Thank your dear father! behold yourself lord of Percemont."

"Yes," I said, "baron of thistles and lord of screech-owls, That is something to be proud of. I think you must have some visiting cards engraved which will acquaint the people around us with these lofty titles."

"My titles are more lofty than those," he replied. "I am the son of the most able and most honest man in the province. My name is Chantebel, and I consider myself as greatly ennobled by my father's deeds; I disdain all other lordship; but the romantic manor-house, the steep peak, the wild wood, are charming playthings for which I thank you, dear father, and if you are willing, I shall find therein, some pepper-box, a little nest where from time to time I can read or dream."

"If that is the height of your ambition, I approve," said I, "and I give you the plaything. You will allow the game to come back which the old baron shot without cessation—having, I fancy, nothing else to put in his pantry—and next year we will kill a few hares together. With this understanding let us proceed to dinner, after which we will talk of more serious matters."

I had indeed serious projects for my son, and we were not about to discuss them for the first time. I wished him to marry his cousin, Emilie Ormonde, who was familiarly called Miliette, or, still better, Miette. My late

sister had married a rich countryman of the vicinity, the owner of a large farm, who had left at least a hundred thousand crowns to each of his children, Miette and Jacques Ormonde. Jacques was thirty years old, Emilie was twenty-two.

When I had refreshed Henri's memory in regard to this plan, concerning which he did not appear over-anxious to converse, I watched him still more attentively, as I had attacked him unexpectedly in order to surprise his first impression. It was more sad than gay, and he looked at his mother, as if to seek in her eyes the answer he should make. My wife had always approved and desired this marriage; I was therefore extremely surprised when, speaking in place of her son, she said, in a reproachful tone,—

"Indeed, M. Chantebel, when you have set your mind on anything, it is like an iron wedge in a piece of rock. Can you not leave this poor boy, who is worn out with exhausting labor, and who needs to breathe freely, a single moment of joy and liberty? Is it necessary so soon to talk to him about putting the marriage-halter around his neck?"

"Is it, then, a halter to hang one's self with?" I replied, a little angry; "do you find it so uncomfortable, and do you wish to make him think that his parents do not live happily together?"

"I know it is not so," Henri replied, quickly. "I know that we three make only one. If you both wish that I should marry immediately, I stand for nothing, and wish to stand for nothing; but—"

"But, if I am entirely alone in my opinion," I resumed, "it is I who will count for nothing. Then, we three do not make one, and matters will be decided between us by the majority of votes."

"Do you know, M. Chantebel," said my wife, who was not wanting in sense on the occasion, "We are happy in marriage in our fashion, but every one regards it in his own way, and since the good to be looked for, or the evil that is risked, concerns our son exclusively, my opinion is, that we should neither of us give him advice, but leave him to decide the question by himself."

"This is exactly the conclusion that I held in reserve," replied I; "but I thought he was in love with Miette, and had decided a long time ago to marry her as soon as possible."

"And Miette?" said Henri, earnestly—"is she as decided as I am, and do you think that she is in love with me?"

"In love is a term which is not found in Miette's vocabulary. You know her: a young woman, calm, pure, decided, and sincere; the personification of integrity, goodness, and courage. It is certain that Miette has a great friendship for you. She has, besides me, only one guide and friend in this world, her brother Jacques whom she blindly loves and respects. Miette Ormonde will marry whomsoever Jacques Ormonde chooses, and, since his childhood Jacques Ormonde, who is your best friend, has destined his sister for you. What do you wish for better than this?"

"I could never desire nor hope for anything better if I were loved," replied Henri; "but let me tell you, my father, that this affection on which I thought I could rely has for some time grown strangely cold. Jacques did not reply when I announced my approaching return, and Emilie's last letters displayed a noticeable reserve."

"Did you not set her the example?"

"Has she complained?"

"Miette never complains of anything; she only re-

marked an abstracted kind of manner in your letters, and, when I wished her to rejoice with me at the prospect of your return, she appeared to doubt if it were as near as I announced. Come, my son, tell us the truth. You may safely make confession to your parents. I do not ask you to give us an account of diversions for which Miette could reproach you. We, students of former times, have all passed through them, and I do not pretend that we were better than you ; still we returned joyfully to the fold. Perhaps in your correspondence with your cousin you have suffered a regret to escape you for matters which you would do wrong to take too seriously."

" I hope not, my dear father, for this regret was very slight and was quickly effaced by the thought of your happiness. I cannot recall that any such expressions escaped me ; I am surely not simple enough to have said, or even thought of anything that would furnish a motive for the icy tone that my little cousin assumed in replying to me."

" Have you the letter with you ? "

" I will get it for you in a moment."

Henri went out, and my wife, who had listened in silence, said quickly, " My husband, this marriage is broken off ; we must think of it no longer."

" Why ? Who has broken it off ? For what purpose ? "

" Miette is rigid and cold ; she understands nothing of the requirements of a life of elegance in a certain situation ; she is incapable of pardoning a slight wandering from the right path in a young man's life."

" Nonsense ! what are you talking about ? Miette knows very well all the follies committed by her brother when he studied law in Paris, and I do not believe Henri

has a quarter as many to reproach himself with. However, Miette never manifested any disquietude or vexation; she received her brother with open arms when he returned, two years since as much a seeker after adventures, and as little of a lawyer, as possible. She helped him pay his debts, without a word of reproach or regret. He told this to me not long since, adding that his sister was an angel for indulgence and generosity; and now you would like—"

Henri, who returned with the letter, here interrupted us. This letter was not cold, as he pretended. Emilie was never very demonstrative, and her habitual modesty prevented her from becoming more so; but it was plain that she was under the influence of a trouble and some kind of fright in her own home that were entirely unusual. "Friendship," she said, "is indissoluble, and you will always find in me a devoted sister; but do not distress yourself about marriage; if time for reflection is necessary for you, it is also necessary for me, and we have made no engagement that we cannot discuss or put off, according to circumstances."

"You will remark," observed Henri, addressing me, "that she calls me *you*, instead of *thou*, for the first time."

"That must be your fault," I replied. "Let us see! Come to the fact. Are you really in love, yes or no, with your cousin?"

"In love?"

"Yes, passionately in love?"

"He is at a loss how to answer you," said my wife. "He is asking himself, perhaps, if he ever were so."

Henri seized the line his mother held out. "Yes," he cried, "that is quite true! I do not know if the respectful and fraternal sentiment which Miette has inspired in

me from childhood can be called love. Passion has never mingled with it on either side."

"And you wish for passion in marriage?"

"Do you think I am wrong?"

"I think nothing about it; I am not making a theory. I wish to know the state of your heart. If Miette Ormonde loved some one else, you would be perfectly satisfied?"

Henri turned pale, and blushed the next moment. "If she loves another," he replied, in a voice full of emotion, "let her say so! I have no right to oppose her, and I am too proud to allow myself to reproach her."

"Come!" I resumed; "the thing is clear, and the case is settled. Listen: we dined at four o'clock; it is now hardly six. You can reach your cousin's in half an hour. You will take Prunelle, your good little mare, who has not been used much during your absence, and who will be enchanted to carry you. You have nothing to say to Miette, excepting that, having this minute arrived, you hasten to grasp her hand and her brother's. This eagerness is the most concise and clear explanation of what concerns you. You will see whether it is met with pleasure or indifference. Nothing more is required for a young man of spirit. Welcomed joyfully, you remain with them an hour, and return to tell us your triumph. Otherwise guided by the first words, you come back immediately without asking anything more. It is very simple, and cuts short all the theories we could construct, as well as all the fine words we could say."

"You are right," replied Henri; "I will go at once."

CHAPTER II.

In order to pass away the time, my wife took her knitting while I amused myself with a book. I saw, indeed, that she was burning to contradict and quarrel with me, and I pretended not to suspect it; but she burst out at last, and I let her alone in order to find out her thoughts. I discovered that her son's marriage with Miette had become undesirable in her mind, and that her letters or words had had some influence in the estrangement of the lovers. She no longer loved her poor niece, and found her too much of a vine-dresser, too humbly born, for her son; her fortune was suitable, but Henri was an only son, and could aspire to a richer heiress. He had luxurious tastes and habits which Miette would never understand. She had made of her brother, once brilliant and polished, a great peasant, fast growing into unwieldy proportions. She had all the virtues as well as all the prejudice and obstinacy of a countrywoman. It was allowable to think of this marriage when Henri was still a scholar and a provincial. Now that he had come back from Paris in all the splendor of his good looks, his clothes, and his grand manners, he must seek for a girl of birth, one capable of shining in society.

I listened to all this in silence, and when it was ended I said:—"Do you wish me to draw a conclusion?"

"Yes; speak."

"Well, if this marriage is detestable, it is neither Henri's nor Miette's fault; it is the fault of the great Tower of Percemont!"

"Indeed!"

"Yes; without this accursed tower we should have always been the good and happy citizens of former times, and should not have found my sister's children too much like peasants; but since we have machicolations above our vines, and an ornamented door to our winepress—"

"A winepress! You intend to make a winepress of our chateau?"

"Yes, my dear friend; and if this does not put an end to your folly, I intend to demolish the old shed!"

"You cannot do that!" cried Madame Chantebel, indignantly. "The chateau is your son's, you gave it to him."

"When he sees that the chateau has turned your brain, he will help me to demolish it."

My wife was afraid of raillery. She grew calm, and promised to wait patiently for Emilie's decision; but she soon had a new source of agitation. The hours passed, and Henri did not return. I was rejoiced; I thought his cousins had kept him, and that all three were very happy in seeing each other once more. At last it was midnight, and my wife, fearing some accident, was continually going from the garden to the road, when the steps of Henri's little mare were heard, and a moment after he was with us.

"Nothing has happened to me," he replied to his mother, who questioned him with great anxiety. "I saw Emilie a moment, and I learned that her brother had been living for a month on his farm in Champgousse, where he is having a large building put up. Emilie, being alone at home, gave me to understand that I must not prolong my visit; and, as it was still early, I directed my course to Champgousse to see Jacques. I did not remember the road, and went further than was necessary. At last I saw Jacques, talked and smoked an hour with

him, and here I am after riding three leagues on my way back through intricate paths which, without the intelligence of my horse, I should not easily have recognized in the obscurity."

"And how did Emilie receive you?" asked Madame Chantebel.

"Very pleasantly," replied Henri, "as nearly as I could judge in so short a time."

"No chiding, no reproaches?"

"None at all."

"And Jacques?"

"He was as cordial as usual."

"Then nothing is decided?"

"The subject of marriage was not agitated. That is a question we must discuss with you."

My wife, reassured, retired to her room, and Henri immediately took my arm and drew me to the garden. "I must speak to you," he said. "What I have to tell you is very delicate, and I feared that my mother would take the matter so much to heart that she would not be prudent. This is what occurred."

"Sit down," I said, "and I will listen to you."

Henri, very much troubled, related to me what follows.

CHAPTER III.

"First, I must tell you the state of my feelings when I was going to see Emilie. It is very true that before quitting Parisian life I had a feeling of terror in thinking of marriage. The ideal dreamed of in my early youth

had grown fainter year after year in the feverish atmosphere of the capital. You saw me so in love with my cousin when I began my study of the law that you were afraid—I well understood it—of my progress in my studies being retarded by my impatience to get through with them. You did not understand that this fervor of love and marriage was a phase of collegiate life, and found its natural place between the baccalaureate and the first law-entry. Perhaps you did not foresee that the impatience would very soon be calmed, and possibly desiring this marriage as you did, you would have done better to allow me to come home at the vacations. You thought it your duty to divert me from an anxiety which I never felt after the first year's absence. You passed your own vacations with me, travelled with me, took me to the seaside, to Switzerland, and then to Florence and Rome—in short, you so well fulfilled your duty that I did not see Emilie for four years. The result is that I dreaded to see her again lest I should find her no longer as charming as she had appeared to me in the splendor of her eighteen years.

"I thought of this while galloping towards her abode just as the sun was setting, and felt tempted to moderate the ardor of Prunelle, who went on the wings of the wind. She was constrained, however, to do this for herself as we approached Vignolette, and went at a slow pace up the sandy ascent that has to be climbed to gain a view of the roof of the house buried in the foliage. There my disturbed mind at once grew calm, and an indescribably tender emotion took possession of my heart. The evening was beautiful; there was a golden glow in the heavens and on the earth. The mountains appeared in the mists of a rosy violet tint. The road shone under my feet like the dust of rubies. The vines waved play-

fully on the hills, and the great purpled branches, loaded with fruit already black, stood erect and hung in abundant festoons over my head. Pardon me, I have written poetry! My happy, youthful days returned once more. I dreamed over the scenes of my forgotten pastorals. I fancied myself transported to the time when, in my collegian's garb—too short for my great lean arms—I approached with a palpitating heart the abode of my little cousin, then so pretty, gracious, and confiding! I recommenced my love-dreams, and it seemed to me that hopes and desires which had taken entire possession of my being could not be a vain illusion. I spurred on my horse, and arrived, panting, feverish, fearful, and passionately in love as when I was seventeen years old!

"Do not be impatient, my father. I must sum up what a few hours ago was the past, a past already more than a century from the present. I trembled when knocking at the door, that little door painted green, still frayed and mended with great nails as in former times. I took pleasure in recognizing every object, and in finding the wild honeysuckle shading the rustic entrance as fresh as ever and grown into a great bush. Formerly an iron wire extending along this arbor of vines was sufficient to give entrance to familiar acquaintances without troubling any one; but this hospitable confidence had disappeared; I had to wait at least five minutes. I said to myself: 'Emilie is alone, and perhaps she is at the end of the enclosure. It takes time to cross the vineyard, but she must have recognized my peculiar way of knocking; she will come and open the door for me herself as in the old times!'

"She did not come; old Nicole opened the door and took hold of my horse's bridle with an eagerness full of trouble. 'Enter, enter, M. Henri! Yes, yes, mademoi

selle is very well; she is at home, M. Henri; you must excuse us, it is washing-day, our people have all gone to the river to bring back the linen; this is the reason you had to wait. You know very well, M. Henri, these are the days when everything is topsy-turvy.'

"I quickly cleared the long and narrow walk, too long at least for my liking! Formerly they recognized my voice at a distance, and Jacques ran to meet me. Jacques was absent. Emilie came to meet me at the head of the flight of steps. She held out her hand first; but there was more terror than joy in her surprise at seeing me. She was dressed as she used to be, in a half-girlish fashion, the muslin dress well turned back on the hips, the silk apron trimmed with lace, the little straw hat of peasant-shape turned back behind over her magnificent braids of brown hair. She was still as pretty as ever, perhaps even prettier! Her fresh countenance had become a little more oval in form, her eyes were larger, and a serious expression rendered her glance more penetrating, her smile more full of meaning. I do not know what we said to each other; we were both very much moved. We asked about the news, and did not listen to the answers.

"I understood at last that Jacques (Jaquet, as she always calls him) was putting up some buildings on a farm a couple of leagues away. Champgousse is his part of the inheritance. For a long time the stables and barns had been going to ruin. He did not wish to trust the work to a contractor, who would have charged him a high price without doing things to suit him. He had, therefore, installed himself with his tenants, so as to be there from sunrise to sunset, and watch the labor of his workmen.

"'But he comes to see you every day?'

"'No it is too far away; it would keep him up very late. I am going to see him next Sunday, to make sure that he does not want for anything.'

"'It must be very tedious for him to be there alone?'

"'No, he is so busy!'

"'But does not this solitude make you sad?'

"'I have no time to think of it; there is always so much to do when one has a home to look after.'

"'You should come and live with us!'

"'That is impossible.'

"'You are, then, still a model housekeeper?'

"'It is necessary.'

"'And you like this austere life?'

"'As well as I ever did.'

"'You do not think—'

"'Of what?'

"'Of being two to—'

"I believe I came near committing myself, when Emilie rose abruptly as she heard the creaking of the dining-room door adjoining the drawing-room; she rushed forward in that direction, and I heard her say very distinctly,'He is there—do not let him see you!'

"You start with surprise, father. I felt a rending of the heart. I heard the door shut, and Emilie returned, absent-minded and constrained, and asked me some idle questions about your health and what you were doing; although she knows everything that concerns you, and it was I rather who should have learned the news from her. I saw that my presence was simply torture to her, and that her eyes watched the clock in spite of herself so as to count the insupportable minutes of my stay. I took up my hat, saying that as yet I had scarcely seen you, and, besides, I was unwilling to encroach further upon her time. 'You are right,' she replied. 'You cannot come here as

you used to—I am alone in the house, and it would not be proper; but if you will go next Sunday to see Jaquet at Champgousse, we shall meet there.' I do not remember if I made any reply. I hurried off, running as if my clothes were on fire, fetched Prunelle from the stable, and started at full speed on the road home. And then I suddenly stopped short, asking myself if I were dreaming, and if I were not insane. 'Miette Ormonde unfaithful, or concealing a lover in her house! No it is impossible,' I said; 'but I wish to know and I will know! I will go and see Jacques. I will question him frankly. He is an upright man; he is my friend, and will tell me the truth.'

"I took the cross road that leads to Champgousse. I lost my way at times, for it was entirely dark. At last I arrive in the obscurity, and catch a glimpse of a mass of buildings, which do not appear to me noticeably changed. I dismount in the midst of furious dogs. I look for the door of the master's dwelling, when suddenly it half opens. In the light projected from the interior, I detect the huge form of Jacques Ormonde in the dress of one just risen from his bed.

"He throws himself into my arms, clasps me vigorously in his, cried out that he had gone to bed, and that he was very near taking his gun to receive me, for he thought it was a robber, the dog made such an uproar. He took possession of Prunelle, and, still half naked, led her himself to the stable, where I followed to assist him in unbridling her. 'Let me do it,' he said, 'you cannot see. I see in the night like an owl, and then I know where to find everything.' In truth, he makes all the arrangements, gives water, grain, forage, to his 'little friend Prunelle, returns without having awoke any one, distributes plentiful kicks to his dogs, who still growl at me, makes me

enter his sitting-room, the sole luxury of which consists in guns of all calibres and pipes of all dimensions. There were neither books, an inkstand, nor pens; all was exactly like his student's room in the Latin Quarter at Paris.

"'Ah! how long is it since you arrived in the country?'

"'Only since this afternoon.'

"'And you come to see me immediately? That is pleasant, indeed; and I thank you. How are they all at your house? I believe, it is more than a month since I have seen your parents. I have so much to do here! I cannot leave; but they knew where I had pitched my tent this time, since you surprise me here.'

"'They knew absolutely nothing, for they sent me to Vignolette, where I expected to find you.'

"Here Jaquet's expressive face became distorted, and the great fellow blushed like a young woman might have done at the least surprise. He exclaimed, in a tone full of alarm and anxiety: 'You come from Vignolette? You have seen my sister?'

"'Reassure yourself,' I replied; 'I have seen no one but her.'

"'You have seen only *her*? She has, then, told you—'

"'She has told me everything,' I replied, with assurance, wishing at any price to profit by his emotion in order to extract the truth from him.

"'She told you—but you did not see the *other?*

"'I did not see the *other*.'

"'She told you her name?'

"'She did not tell me *her* name.'

"'She intrusted the secret to you?

"'She intrusted nothing to me.'

"'Ah, well! I ask as a matter of honor, and in the

name of the friendship you have for us, that you will not breathe a word of what you have found out! Will you swear not to reveal it?'

"'I have no need to swear when Emilie's honor is at stake.'

"'That is right. I am an idiot. But you must take some refreshment, and smoke a pipe, a cigar—which do you prefer? Take your choice; I am going down into the cellar.'

"'Do not give yourself so much trouble.'

"'It is very little trouble,' he replied, opening a trap-door in the middle of the room. My provision is always at hand.'

"And in a moment he descended two steps, and returned, bearing a basketful of bottles of every growth in his vineyard.

"'Thank you,' I said, 'but I have lost the habit of drinking wine in the way of refreshment. Have you any *eau piquante?*'

"'I should think so; the acidulated source runs at my door. Here it is entirely fresh; put a little brandy in it. Hold! here is the cognac and sugar; mix some grog for yourself.'

"I saw, while I was mixing according to my taste, that he uncorked his own wine, to drink himself; and, knowing how wine loosens the tongue, I feigned a great thirst, to induce him to drink as well. I hoped for the revelation of the grand secret; but it was lost labor for him to swallow the wine of his hills; he always changed the conversation with an address of which I did not believe him capable. Besides, I quickly gave up the role. Why did I want to know the name of the man who had taken possession of my place in Emilie's heart? She ought to have said to me frankly; 'I do not love you any

longer; I am going to marry some one else.' Jacques appeared to think that she had told me so. I wished to go directly to the point, and interrupted him in the midst of his digressions by saying, 'Let us talk about serious affairs. When is the marriage to take place?'

"'My marriage?' replied he. 'Well, I must wait a month before I am able to declare myself openly.'

"'You have, then, marriage projects on your own account?'

"'Yes, great projects; but do not ask me to tell you anything more. I am very much in love, and I hope to marry—that is all. A month hence you will be the first one in whom I shall confide.'

"'That is to say, that you will never confide in me during the present chapter, for in a month you will have forgotten it, and will commence another.'

"'It is true that I am unsteady. I have given too many proofs of this to deny it; but this time it is serious, very serious, upon my word of honor!'

"'So be it; but I did not speak of your marriage Do not pretend to misunderstand me. I spoke of Emilie's marriage.'

"'Of my sister's marriage with you? Ah! so it is again under discussion! Well, I regret it very much, I can assure you!'

"'"Again under discussion" is a charming expression!' I exclaimed bitterly.

"He did not allow me to continue. 'Well, yes,' he said, 'it is broken off. You ought not to complain, for it is according to your own wish. Did you not write to Miette, a month or six weeks since, a kind of veiled confession, in which you doubted the possibility of her pardon, and appeared to submit to her refusal, with a very resigned sorrow? I understood it all very well, and,

questioned by her, I told her in a pleasant way that the enjoyments of youth were nothing grave, and did not prevent true love from again becoming serious. She did not know what I meant; and asked me a number of questions too delicate for me to reply to. Then she went to see your parents; your father was not at home. She talked with your mother, who did not conceal from her that you were leading a gay life in Paris, and laughed in her face when she manifested astonishment. My dear aunt is sometimes too frank. She gave Miette clearly to understand that, if your infidelity scandalized her, the family would be easily consoled in spite of her, and that there would be no difficulty in procuring a finer establishment for you. Poor Miette was utterly cast down, and repeated to me the conversation, without any reflections of her own. I wished to console her; she said, "It is unnecessary for any one to teach me what my duty is;" and, if she wept I did not see it. I think she has had a great sorrow, but is too proud to own it, and now she knows of your mother's aversion to the marriage, I do not believe she will ever hear it spoken of.'

"Surprised and angry at learning that my mother indulged such feelings, but not wishing to hear from those she had wounded their grievances against her—feeling, besides, that the first wrong had come from me, and that in my student's life I had allowed my infidelity to be too apparent—I asked Jacques to allow me to leave. 'I am tired,' I said; 'I have a headache, and, if I am vexed, I do not wish to yield to my feelings at this moment. We will put off the explanation to another day. When will you come to lunch with me?'

"'You,' he replied, 'must pass the day with me on Sunday. Miette will be here, and you can talk the matter over together. You will then have consulted your

parents, and will know if my sister's pride was voluntarily wounded; and, as I am sure you will regret it, you will afterwards become good friends.'

"'Yes, we shall become brother and sister; for I presume she will tell me frankly what she ought to have told me this evening.'

"Thereupon we separated—he still gay, I sad as death. I had, indeed, a frightful headache, which was relieved by the fresh air; and now I am stupid and bruised like a man who has just fallen from the roof of a house on to the pavement."

When my son had finished speaking, we looked at each other earnestly, for, while telling the story, he had followed me into the drawing-room. "I am very well satisfied with your recital," I said; "it is comparatively clear at the first view, However, if I had, like a judge, to take into consideration the detailed deposition of a witness, I should reproach you for not being very clear-sighted; I should ask if it were very certain that you found a man in Miette Ormonde's house."

"I am sure of the words I heard. Would she have said to a woman, in speaking of me, 'He is there—do not let him see you?' Besides, Jacques' confession—"

"Presents to my judgment some singular ambiguities."

"In what way?"

"I cannot exactly say. I must reflect carefully, and make a serious inquiry. I will spare no pains, if it is necessary—that is, if you are still interested in Emilie. Do you really love her very much? Is the trouble in which I now see you simply the result of wounded pride? Are you offended to find Emilie so susceptible and so quickly consoled? In that case your reason and your goodness of heart will soon gain the ascendency. The

affair will clear up of itself; either Emilie will be justified, and you will still love each other, or she will avow her engagement with another, and you will go philosophically to her wedding. But if, as I think, your sorrow is sufficiently deep—if there is grieved and wounded love in your heart—then Emilie must return to you, and send away the suitor who has insinuated himself into her favor to take advantage of her vexation at your absence."

"Emilie ought not to have received the attentions of this pretender. She should have known that I was not a man to contend for a wife who compromised her reputation, and gave herself up to vengeance. I regarded her as a kind of saint; she is now no more in my estimation than an inconsistent and undignified little village coquette."

"Then you ought not to regret her, and you do not regret her?"

"No, father, I do not regret her. I had no longer any desire to be married; but if I had found her such as I knew her, or thought I knew her, I would have offered her my hand and heart out of respect to her and to you. Now I am rejoiced to be able to break the bond without grieving you, and without caring myself for any regret she will feel."

I could not obtain from my son any more softened avowal of his sorrow. He was so inflexible and stern as to disturb the first opinion that I had formed, leading me to think he would be easily consoled. It was late; we agreed to say nothing to my wife, and to put off to the next day our calm judgment upon the strange event of the evening.

CHAPTER IV.

Henri slept late the next morning, and I had no leisure to talk with him. At nine o'clock my wife announced to me the arrival of the Countess de Nives. I was just getting ready to shave myself, and begged Madame Chantebel to entertain this client until I was ready.

"No," she said, "I dare not. I am not fashionable enough. This lady is so beautiful, she has so noble an air, and such a magnificent carriage and horses—ah! true English horses, a coachman who looks like a lord, and a footman in livery!"

"All that dazzles you, lady of Percemont!"

"This is not the time to jest, M. Chantebel. What are you doing there, wiping your razor a dozen times? Make haste!"

"I cannot cut my throat to please you. To-day how eager you are to see me run after this countess! Yesterday you blamed me for accepting her as a client so quickly!"

"I had not seen her. I did not think she held so high a position in the fashionable world. Well! here are your white cravat and your black coat."

"No, indeed! we are in the country; I will not appear in full dress at nine o'clock in the morning."

"Yes, yes!" cried my wife, putting on, in spite of me, the dress-cravat. "I wish you to look like what you are!"

To cut the matter short, I was obliged to yield, and

I passed into my private room, where Madame de Nives awaited me. I had never seen her excepting at a distance, and did not expect to find her still so young and beautiful. She was a woman of about forty years of age. tall, blonde, and slender. Her manners were excellent. Excepting for the romance of her life, which I knew *grosso modo*, her reputation was irreproachable.

"I come, sir," she said, "to ask counsel in a very delicate affair, and you will allow me to tell you my story, of which you probably do not know the details. If I encroach upon your time—"

"My time is yours," I replied, and, having seated her in an easy-chair, I listened.

"My name is Alix Dumont. I belong to an honorable but poor family, who brought me up with the expectation of my having to earn my own living. I was a teacher in various boarding-schools for young ladies. When I was twenty-two years old I entered the service of the Countess de Nives, as governess for her only daughter, Marie, then ten years old.

"Madame de Nives treated me with much esteem and confidence. Without her kind consideration, I could not have endured Marie's undisciplined character and fantastic caprices. She was an unreasonable and heartless child, whom no one could restrain. This sad duty was very painful to me; and when, two years later, Madame de Nives died, commending her daughter to my care, I begged the Count de Nives to spare me a task beyond my strength: I wished to go away.

"He would not allow me to leave; he entreated, said that without me his way of living would be broken up, and his daughter abandoned to the chances of an education that he did not know how to direct. I was obliged to yield; he placed me at the head of the house; and

Marie, who knew she would be compelled to enter a convent if I left, put more restraint upon herself, and begged me to remain.

"The Count de Nives, after having been a widower for a year, announced to me that he wished to marry again, and that he had chosen me for the companion of his life. I refused, on account of the child, whose aversion, I foresaw, would be always ready to burst forth; and, when he insisted, I took flight, without letting him know where I went. I remained concealed for several months with some of my old friends. He discovered my retreat, and came to entreat me once more to accept his proposal. He had sent Marie to a convent. She accuses me to this day of having separated her from her father. On the contrary, I did my best to bring her back to him. The count was inflexible towards her even on his death-bed.

"Beset by a passion which in spite of myself I began to share, pressed by my friends to accept the honorable offer of M. de Nives, I became his wife, and am now the mother of a daughter. Her name is Leonie; she is seven years old, and the living portrait of her father.

"I was happy, for I always cherished the hope of reconciling my husband with his elder daughter, when he met with a fall while hunting, and only survived the accident a few days. He left a will in which he made me Marie's guardian, conferring upon me the use of his entire income during my life; but the income is not large; M. de Nives's fortune came from his first wife. The estate that I control, and where I live with my daughter, belongs entirely to Marie, and the time approaches when this young person will demand the account of my guardianship, contrary to her father's intention, after which she will turn us out of the house."

Here Madame Alix de Nives was silent, and looked at me to find out my opinion without giving expression to her own thoughts.

"You wish to know," I said, "some means of eluding this sad necessity. There are none. By M de Nives's will he bestowed upon you the use of all his property, relying upon your character and loyalty to provide for the wants and the establishment of his two daughters. He could not confer upon you the right to dispose of the estate of his deceased wife. Have you brought the will and the two marriage-contracts of the Count de Nives?"

"Yes, here they are."

When I had examined the documents, I saw that the deceased had deluded himself with an idea that his wife had also shared. He believed that he had power to leave her the income of the De Nives estate so long as the landed property, which returned by law to Marie, was not deteriorated or encroached upon.

"My husband took advice before drawing up this will," said the countess, with a doubtful air, seeing me shrug my shoulders.

"He could take advice, madame, but no trustworthy lawyer could have counselled him to make a will like this."

"Excuse me, it was—"

"Do not tell me who, for I am forced to insist that this lawyer, if he is a lawyer, greatly misled him."

The countess bit her lips with vexation. "M. de Nives," she resumed, "always regarded Marie as a person without judgment or reason, and incapable of managing her affairs. He destined her for the cloister. If he had lived, he would have obliged her to take the veil."

"M. de Nives was the victim of an illusion in this case also; ancient families sometimes neglect to gain

information on present usages. I have heard that M. de Nives did not always take into account what has been introduced into legislation since 1789; but you, madame, who are still young, and must by your education have overcome certain prejudices, do you admit that a legitimate heiress can be forced to resign her rights and enter a convent!"

"No, but the law can place her in custody and deprive her of the power to exercise her civil rights if she has given proof of insanity."

"That is another question! Is Mademoiselle Marie de Nives really insane?"

"Did you never hear of it, M. Chantebel?"

"I have heard that she was odd; but people say so many things!"

"Public opinion has, however, its value."

"Not always."

"You astonish me, sir; public opinion is on my side; it has always done me justice; it would still be for me if I invoked it."

"Take care, madame! one must not risk too much the good reputation which it has taken long to acquire. I believe that if you were to apply for a judgment of deprivation of civil rights against Mademoiselle de Nives, you would create many partisans for her who would turn against yourself."

"Does that mean, sir, that you are already prejudiced against me?"

"No, madame; I have the honor to speak to you today for the first time, and I have never seen Mademoiselle de Nives. But examine your situation. Poor and without name, but beautiful and educated, you enter a house the head of which, soon a widower, marries you after having sent away one whose hostile presence would

create nothing but trouble and sorrow for you. This is only a child, his own daughter, whom he sends away, and who attributes her exile to you. You did, you say, your best to bring her back again. It is unfortunate that you did not succeed; it is unfortunate, also, that your husband's will reveals a preference for you that effaces all paternal affection from his heart. Certain persons might think that Mademoiselle Marie's misfortune is your work, and, if she is insane, that you have done everything to make her so,"

"I see, M. Chantebel, that your ear is open to cruel insinuations againt me."

"I declare that it is not so, madame! My judgment arises from the situation in which I find you placed and the counsel you ask of me. But what are the proofs of insanity which your stepdaughter has given?"

"There are more than I could ever tell you. Ever since she was ten years old, she has been rebellious against all discipline, furious against all restraint. Her nature is abnormal, capable of every kind of misconduct. I dare not tell you—"

"Tell me everything or nothing."

"Very well. I believe that, in spite of the seclusion of the convent, she has found means more than once to have guilty relations with—"

"You believe this?"

"And you, you doubt? Very well! I must trust you with a very grave secret. While she lived with the nuns at Riom she was discovered to be carrying on an intrigue with some person outside. I had her transferred to the convent of Clermont, which is more severe in its discipline. Do you know what she did there? She disappeared entirely, sending me a letter in which she declares that she cannot stay in that convent—that she

is going to Paris to enter of her own free will the convent of the Sacre Cœur, where she will remain until the day of her majority."

"Indéed! Well you should have let her do this."

"Yes, I asked nothing better, but I had to assure myself that this pretended change of community did not conceal an elopement or something still worse. I at once begged the nuns of Clermont to say that she had run away to return to my house, and then I immediately hastened to Paris. Marie was not at the Sacre-Cœur; neither was she in any other convent of the city or its environs. She has evidently fled with some man, for the traces of very large feet were seen on the gravel-walk of the garden from which she took her flight."

"This is not insanity, as it is understood in forensic medicine. It is simply misconduct."

"This misconduct imposes upon the guardian the duty of finding the guilty person and reinstating her in some convent of the most severe order."

"Agreed! Have you accomplished this?"

"No. I passed a whole month in useless search, and tired out, I returned to my little Leonie, from whom I could not be separated any longer. I did not wish to trust to any one the sorrowful secret that you have just heard, but it is necessary that I should act, and I come to ask you what I ought to do. Must I apply to the courts, to the police, or to whom, in order to have Marie discovered and snatched from infamy? Or rather must I keep silent, conceal her disgrace, and suffer her to ruin me and drive me away from my husband's house? Should this wicked girl be declared incapable of managing her affairs, she will still have to thank me for defending her immodesty under the plea of insanity. On the other hand, if I let her go unpunished, should I ful-

fil my duty to my own daughter, who will be banished and despoiled without my having made an attempt to save her?"

"You must give me time to reflect, and to review all the facts with you, before I pronounce an opinion."

"But time presses, sir! Marie will be of age in twenty-nine days. If any attempt is to be made, it would be proper to announce to the court and the public the fact of her disappearance before she gets the start of me by putting in her claims and entering into possession."

"If she is ready to put in her claims, and reappears at the appointed time, she is not insane, and every one will believe that she is in full possession of her reason. You would then have nothing but the charge of misconduct against her. This will be of no avail from the day when your guardianship ceases. No text of law deprives a girl of twenty-one years of age, who was simply guilty of a folly a month before, of her rights and liberty. Something else would be necessary besides a love-affair through a grating, and an escape over the walls of a convent, to prove she was deprived of reason."

Madame de Nives listened to me attentively, and her glance questioned me with grievous intensity. Was she avaricious of money and comfort to such a degree as to risk everything to avoid having to make restitution? Was she moved by maternal love or by one of those feminine spites which render the reason deaf to the injunctions to follow a prudent course? Her beauty had at the first view a character of distinction and serenity. At this moment she was so visibly agitated that she raised a vague sensation of fright in me, as if the devil in person had come to ask me how to set the four corners of the world on fire. My scrutinizing look made her own hesitate. "Sir," she said, rising and taking a few steps,

as if she had cramps in her limbs, "you are very hard to persuade. I expected to find in you counsel and support, whereas I find an examining magistrate who wishes to be more sure than I am myself of the goodness of my cause."

"It is my duty, madame. I am not at the commencement of my career; I have no need to gain a name by putting my talent at the service of the first case that presents itself. I do not like to lose a suit, and all the eulogies which the whole world could heap upon me for having pleaded skilfully would not console me for having accepted the defence of a bad cause."

"It is because such is your character," replied Madame de Nives, in a caressing tone, "it is because you have a reputation for scrupulous integrity, it is, finally, because a cause sustained by you is almost always a cause gained beforehand, that I desire to trust mine to you. If you refuse, it will be a great precedent against me."

"If I refuse, madame, it is very easy to keep the step you have taken in coming to see me secret, or I will explain your visit in any way you please. Whatever course you choose, I will act in conformity with your wishes.

"Then yon refuse to go further?"

"I have not refused—I am waiting for you to furnish me with proofs that will satisfy my conscience."

"You wish for more details about Marie de Nives? Well, this is her history. I have told you her character; here are the facts."

The countess sat down again in the easy-chair, and spoke thus: "At eleven years of age this unhappy child was already an inexplicable compound of delirious folly and profound dissimulation. You think these two traits of character are incompatible. You are mistaken. Marie pretended to adore her mother, and perhaps she did love

her after her own fashion. But she never cared for the trouble she caused her if she could only run at random and play truant with the little peasants of the neighborhood. Neither did she care for her mother's suffering when she risked her life in dangerous sports with boys. She mounted the horses in the fields, and galloped without saddle or bridle, at the risk of serious accidents. She climbed trees; she fell, and came home with her clothes torn to pieces; frequently she was even wounded. Here was the delirium, the passion of a violent nature.'

"It was a little the character of her father, I have been told."

"Possibly, sir. He was passionate and impetuous; but he was sincere, and Marie is skilfully deceitful. She will invent all kinds of stories to lay the blame of her faults upon others. When her mother died she was a prey to a despair that seemed to me sincere, but a few days after she again began to play and to run wild."

"She was eleven years old! At that age one cannot weep for a long time without a violent reaction in the direction of active life; that sometimes happens even to grown-up persons."

"Very well, sir; you are pleading for her!"

"I tell you I am not acquainted with her."

"It is certain that you are prepossessed in her favor by some one. Wait a moment—you have a relation, a niece, I think, who was with her at the convent at Riom it was a young lady—pardon me, I have forgotten her name. Marie called her her dear little Miette."

I could not help starting, such a lively commotion was produced in my brain. The person concealed the evening before at Emilie's house—concealed, perhaps, for a month—to whom she had said, "Do not let him see you!"—the cross purposes between Jacques and

my son—that hope of marriage announced by Jacques, and which he would perhaps confide to my son *in a month* —those large footmarks on the gravel-walk of the garden of the Clermont convent! Was the burly Jacques Ormonde, the perpetrator of the abduction? Was Miette Ormonde, the old convent friend, his accomplice?

"What is the matter, M. Chantebel?" asked Madame de Nives, who was watching me. I had instinctively put my hand to my forehead to collect my ideas. "Are you tired of listening to me?"

"No, madame; I am trying to remember. Truly, I cannot recall that Mademoiselle Ormonde, my niece, has ever spoken to me of Mademoiselle de Nives."

"Then I will continue."

"Do so. I am listening."

"When Marie saw that I sincerely mourned for her mother, she seemed to change her opinion in regard to me, and, bursting into tears, she embraced me, thanking me for having taken faithful care of the dying. I believed that better feelings had taken possession of her heart: she deceived me. When she heard her father beg me to remain, she became disagreeable and outrageous. I then resolved to go away, and announced my determination; but her father having said she should go into a convent, she threw herself at my feet and begged me to remain. Two days later she resisted and abused me again. Her dread of the convent could not overcome her hatred and wickedness."

"Bad character, aversion, provoked perhaps by yours, natural impetuosity, the unreasonableness of childhood, inconsistency in passion; I grant all this, but I do not yet see any proof of mental alienation."

"Wait! When her father, during my absence, had put her in the convent, telling her that she should never

come out, there were, I am told, outbursts of despair. The nuns treated her with great gentleness and kindness. She very quickly made up her mind, and, as they talked to her of the happiness of a religious life, she told them that she was inclined to try it. She appeared really to be very pious, and the nuns were fond of her. When M. de Nives, after our marriage, brought me home, I went to make inquiries concerning her. She was entirely engrossed with amusements, and very idle: she learned nothing, but they believed her good and sincere. I asked to see her. She received me kindly, for she imagined I was going to take her home. I was obliged to tell her that I would give a good account of her conduct to M. de Nives, and would plead her cause, but that I had not permission to take her away immediately.

"When the superior called me madame, as a mark of respect, Marie asked why she did not say mademoiselle. They had foolishly allowed her to remain ignorant of my marriage, and that I was henceforth Madame de Nives. It was necessary to explain the matter to her. She fell into a transport of ungovernable rage, and had to be carried away by force, and shut up. Her fury subsided as quickly as it had displayed itself. She was thirteen and a half years old. She wished to enter at once upon her novitiate, and could hardly be made to comprehend that she was too young, and that while waiting she must strive to improve.

"She worked for a year, but without method, and like a person whose brain is not susceptible of the least application. The teachers tell me that she was not malicious, but slightly idiotic. They were only half mistaken—she is idiotic and malicious.

"I tried to believe them, and was the dupe of her submission. She wrote a letter to her father, deficient

in composition and orthography, such as a child six years old would have written, to tell him that she had decided to take the vows next year, and that she only asked to see once more the room where her mother died and to embrace her little sister Léonie. I begged M. de Nives to grant her this favor, and offered to go for her. He refused emphatically. 'Never!' he said. 'On the day after her mother's death, she threatened to set the house on fire if I married again. She wished me to swear not to give her a stepmother. She had her head full of the servants' gossip in regard to you. She declared if I had other children she would strangle them. She is mad, dangerously mad! She is well off at the convent; religion is the only restraint that can calm her. Write and inform her that I will go to see her some years hence, when she has taken the veil.'

"In the meantime, M. de Nives died without having revoked his decision. Marie manfested a violent sorrow, but resisted the advice of the nuns, who wished her to write to me. They told her, from me, that I was disposed to have her home if she took the least step to conciliate me. She rejected their advice with perfect fury, saying that I had killed her father and mother, and that she would rather die than put her foot in the house."

"Does she really accuse you of this?"

"She accuses me of almost every crime. How can this furious hatred and these outrages be reconciled with the devotion she manifested at the same time? However, I still believed in her religious vocation. These terrible and insane beings can only find alleviation in a mystic life."

"I think otherwise. A mystic life exasperates the troubled mind. But no matter; continue."

"Notwithstanding her apparent devotion to religion,

Marie began, as she grew older, to long for worldly joys, and one day it was discovered that she was carrying on an amorous correspondence outside of the convent with a student whose name was unknown, but whose orthography was on a parallel with her own. I therefore removed Marie, who was getting too old to incur such dangers (she was nearly fifteen years of age), to the cloistered convent of the nuns of Clermont. She seemed at first rebellious, afterwards very gentle, and then very much taken up with amusements. She changed her character and disposition every fortnight. I have all the letters of the superior, describing her as a person whose insanity is beyond question. Marie is not even fit for a nun. She will never be restrained by any rule; she is wanting in intelligence, and the least reasoning exasperates her; she has also nervous attacks, which border on epilepsy; she cries, appears as if she would tear herself in pieces, tries to kill herself. She inspires such fear that they are forced to shut her up. This convent will furnish all the proofs I need, and I have already a certain quantity that I will place in your hands if you will accept the defence of my legitimate interests."

"And if I did not accept, what would you do, madame? Would you renounce a pursuit that offers serious dangers to the honor of both parties? I am willing to believe that the proofs held by you in reserve are overwhelming against Mademoiselle de Nives. Even if I admit that you could succeed in finding out her hiding-place, and that you have the means of dishonoring her in establishing the truth of a shameful folly, do you not fear that the barrister who will defend her cause will impute to you the misfortunes of this young girl, sacrificed by her father, repulsed, persecuted (it will be said), driven to despair by your hatred? If you will follow my advice,

you will proceed no further, you will ignore Mademoiselle de Nives's flight, and await her approaching majority. If she does not appear in that time, your cause will become better, perhaps good. You would have a right to search out the place of her concealment, and to put the police on her track; then we should probably find incontestable proofs of her incapacity. We would make the most of them. I should have no more conscientious scruples. Reflect, madame—I beg you to reflect!"

"I reflected before I came here," replied Madame de Nives, in an unmoved tone, "and I have fully resolved to listen to no counsel that will result in both my own and my daughter's ruin. If I await events, they may indeed be favorable; but if they are not so—if Marie, in spite of her misconduct, is acknowledged to be capable of managing her property—I have no arms against her."

"And you positively wish for it? Whether she is innocent or not, you wish for her fortune at any price?"

"I do not wish for her fortune, which remains inalienable. I want the management of it, according to my husband's desire."

"Well then! You are not taking the path that leads to success, if you attempt to bring dishonor upon the heiress In your place I should wait for her appearance, and then endeavor to effect a compromise with her."

"What compromise?"

"If her reputation is really lost, you can make her feel the price of the generous silence you have kept, and perhaps induce her to refrain from demanding the accounts of your guardianship up to the present day."

"Sell my generosity? I would rather have open war; but, if there is no other means of saving my daughter, I

must resign myself to do it. I will reflect, sir, and, if I follow your advice, will you promise to serve me as an intermediate agent?"

"Yes, if you can fully prove that your stepdaughter's reputation is lost, and that your silence is necessary. I shall then act in her interest as well as yours, for you do not appear to be generous for the pleasure of being so."

"No, sir; I am a mother, and I will not sacrifice my daughter in order to be acceptable to my enemy. But you speak of the account of my guardianship. Has she, then, a right to demand a very strict account?"

"Without any doubt; and, as she has been brought up in the convent, it will be easy to establish almost exactly what you have spent for her education and maintenance. It will not be a large sum, and, if I am rightly informed, the income of the De Nives estate exceeds thirty-five or forty thousand francs a year."

"That is exaggerated!"

"The rents will give evidence. Suppose it is only thirty thousand francs. Have you calculated the amount during the ten years that you have enjoyed the income?"

"Yes; if I am forced to restore this income, I am absolutely ruined. M. de Nives did not leave a hundred thousand francs of capital."

"With that, if you are not forced to make restitution for the past, and if, as I believe, you have been prudent enough to be economical in your expenditure, you will not live in poverty, madame. You are considered an economical and orderly person. You have education and talents, you will yourself attend to the education of your daughter, and you will teach her to do without luxury, or to procure it by her own labor. At all events, you can both enjoy an independent and worthy existence. Do not involve yourself in the disastrous issue of

a lawsuit which will not bring honor to your character, and will cost you very dear, I forewarn you. There is nothing so tedious and so difficult as to exclude from the exercise of her civil rights one even much more alienated in mind than Mademoiselle de Nives appears to be."

"I will reflect," replied Madame de Nives, "as I promised. I thank you, sir, for the attention you have given me, and I ask pardon for the time you have lost in listening to me."

I conducted her to her carriage, and she set out for the De Nives estate, situated five leagues from Riom, on the road to Clermont. I noticed—for I have a habit of noticing everything—that the English horses that had dazzled my wife were thoroughly worn out animals, and that the servants in livery were very shabby. It was evident that this woman sacrificed nothing to luxury.

CHAPTER V.

My wife and son were waiting breakfast for me.

"I shall not take any breakfast," I said to them. "I will merely swallow a cup of coffee while Bibi is being harnessed. I shall not return till three or four o'clock."

While I gave my orders, I examined my son stealthily. His features seemed distorted. "Did you sleep well?" I asked.

"Never better," he replied. "I found my pleasant chamber and my comfortable bed delightful."

"What are you going to do this afternoon?"

"I will go with you, if I am not in your way."

"You would be in my way; so I tell you frankly. I hope to tell you this evening that you will never be in my way again. And even now—I ask you not to go away, because I may return at any moment to say this to you."

"You are going to see Emilie, father? I beg you not to question her, not to speak to her of me. I should suffer mortal agony were she to come back to me after having welcomed another. I have reflected: I do not love her, I never have loved her!"

"I do not expect to see Emiline. I am going on professional business. Not a word of Emilie before your mother!"

Madame Chantebel returned with my coffee. While taking it, I asked Henri to examine the old château and choose the apartment he would like to have arranged for our shooting parties. He promised not to think of anything else, and I took my seat alone in my little cabriolet. I needed no servant to drive the peaceable and vigorous Bibi, and wished for no witness of the step I was about to take.

I set out on the road to Riom, as if I were going to the city; then, turning to the left, I penetrated the sandy and shady roads that lead to Champgousse. I marked out my course, but, as in giving counsel it is necessary to take into account the character and the temperament of persons even more than the facts and the situation, I reviewed in my mind the antecedents, qualities, and faults of my nephew, Jacques Ormonde. The son of my sister, who was the prettiest woman in the country, Jacques had been a very beautiful child, and, as he was very good-natured, we all adored him. It is a misfortune for a man to be too handsome, and to be constantly told of it. The

child was idle, and the young man grew foppish. What can be more agreeable, at the age when one thinks of love, than to read a welcome, bold or bashful, earnest in every case, in all the women's eyes? Jacques had a precocious success; his herculean strength did not exert an unfavorable influence upon his character, but his intellectual strength succumbed to this captious reasoning: "If, without cultivating my moral being, I attain with the greatest ease the triumph which is the feverish aim of youth, why need I spend time and trouble in improving myself?"

Thus he did not study, and his utmost attainment was some knowledge of his own language. He possessed natural intelligence, and that kind of facility which consists in assimilating, the top of the basket without caring for what there is in the bottom. He could talk about everything in a lively way, and pass for an eagle in the eyes of the ignorant. As he was brought up in the country, he was well acquainted with the produce and the culture of the land. He knew all the secrets of the horse-dealers, and made the most of his cattle and commodities. The peasants looked upon him as a sharp fellow, and consulted him with respect. His proverbial honesty with honest people, his familiar and cordial frankness, and his unwearying desire to oblige, made him a general favorite. It was a common saying among the peasants that big Jacques was the best, the handsomest, and the most intelligent man to be found among the farms and villages in the neighborhood.

After finishing his college course, during which he learned nothing, he went to Paris to study law, but gave himself up to a life of dissipation. His years of study were a perpetual fete. Rich, generous, eager for pleasure, and always ready to do nothing, he had numerous friends,

squandered his income gayly, wasted his youth, health, brain, and character, and gave us great uneasiness while seeing him prolong indefinitely his pretended studies.

But at the bottom of all this thoughtlessness my beautiful nephew inherited with his blood an effective means of safety. He had an inborn love of property, and, when it was plain that he must quit this gay life or encroach upon his capital, he returned to the country, and did not again leave it.

His estate of Champgousse was well leased, but the term had expired, and he managed to renew it, at a considerably increased rental, without driving away his tenants; and even discovered the secret of making himself much liked. He formed a plan for building a fine house, but he was in no hurry to carry it out. Vignolette, the paternal mansion, fell to his sister Emilie's share. It was a habitation charming for its simplicity—a luxuriant enclosure of flowers and fruits, in a country adorable for freshness and beauty in that fertile region which extends between the river Morge and the latest eruptions of lava from the Dome mountains towards the north. Miette was so tenderly attached to this dwelling, where she had closed the eyes of her parents, that she preferred to give up the larger portion of the landed inheritance to her brother, and keep the vineyard and house of Vignolette. She lived there alone with my aged sister Anastasie during Jacques's absence, and cared tenderly for this good aunt, who died in her arms, leaving to her all her property, consisting of a hundred thousand francs invested in government funds.

As soon as Miette came into possession of this legacy she wrote to her brother, then in Paris: "I know that you are in debt, as you have directed our notary to sell your meadow and woodland of chestnut-trees. I do not

want you to encroach upon your property. I have money; if you wish for a hundred thousand francs, they are at your service."

Jacques's debts did not amount to half that sum. They were paid, and he returned, resolved never to run into debt again. He decided to live at Vignolette with Emilie, who was left entirely alone by the death of her aunt, and he put off his plan of building at Champgousse until Emilie's marriage took place. During the two years that he had lived with her, his gay life had taken a strange practical character. He carefully concealed his wild adventures from the good Emilie; this was easily accomplished, as she lived in absolute retirement, and hardly ever left her home. He attended shooting expeditions in all directions, and joined his friends in pleasure-parties in every season of the year.

Jacques had nearly reached his thirtieth year and had never spoken of marriage. He was so happy in his liberty, and used it so well! He was growing very stout; his complexion, once fair as a girl's, had taken a purplish lustre in striking contrast with his silver-blonde hair. He had one of those faces that one can see afar off, with high color, large features, a fine aquiline nose, and a quivering movement which brought out two natural marks on the skin, once charming, but now a little like warts. The chin was distinguishable beneath the fine light silky beard, which resembled a tuft of ripe corn in the midst of a field of poppies. The expression of the eyes was always lively and amiable, but too bright to be tender. The mouth remained handsome and healthy, but the charm of the smile was effaced. It was easy to see that wine and other excesses had cut down the flower of a youth still susceptible of abundant growth, and Henri defined very justly the impressive, agreeable, and

slightly grotesque appearance of his cousin when he said, "He is a buffoon, still young and good."

Having recalled all this to mind, to decide how to open fire with him, I arrived at the entrance of the farm. The workmen told me that M. Jacques was in a wood near by, and offered to call him. I intrusted Bibi to their care, and hastened in search of my nephew.

CHAPTER VI.

I EXPECTED to encounter him engaged in shooting, instead of which I found him extended on the turf, sleeping under a tree. He slept so soundly that I was obliged to touch him lightly with the end of my cane to waken him.

"Ah, uncle!" he cried, starting with a bound upon his great feet, what a pleasant surprise, and I am so glad to see you! I was just thinking about you!"

"That is to say, you were dreaming about me?"

"Yes, perhaps; I was asleep? It is no matter; you were in my thoughts. You seemed to be angry with me; that is not true, is it?"

"Why should I be angry?"

"Because it is a very long time since I have been to see you; I am so busy here."

"I see that plainly. Fatigue has overpowered you, and you are therefore forced to take a *siesta*, no matter where."

"Come here and see my plans, uncle; you must give me advice.

"Another time. I come now to ask you for information. You know, I am told, a young person who is called Mademoiselle de Nives?"

Jacques started at this abrupt attack. "Who told you so, uncle? I am not acquainted with her."

"But you know persons who are acquainted with her, since Miette is one of them. She must talk to you sometimes of her old friend at the convent?"

"Yes, no—stay! I cannot remember. You would like—what would you like to know?"

"I want to know if she is an idiot."

This brutal word fell like a second stone on Jacques's head, and his ruddy complexion grew slightly pale.

"Idiot! Mademoiselle de Nives an idiot! Who pretends to think so?"

"The head of a family who came to consult me this morning, as one of his sons wishes to ask this young person in marriage as soon as she leaves the convent. Well, this father had heard that the young lady was not in possession of her reason, that she was epileptic, insane, or imbecile."

"Indeed! I do not know. How should I know?" replied Jacques, who, scarcely recovered from his surprise, began to put himself on guard.

"Then, if you do not know anything, I must find Miette, who will be better informed, and will be willing to give me the information I desire."

Here was a new trouble for Jacques. "Miette will call upon you, uncle," said he. "There is no need of your going to see her."

"Why should I not? It is not very far."

"She is probably not at home to-day. She had some purchases to make at Riom."

"It is no matter; if I do not find her, I will leave word that she may expect me to-morrow."

"She will call on you, uncle, I will let her know that you want to see her."

"Are you so very much afraid of my going to Vignolette?"

"It is for the sake of sparing you useless trouble uncle."

"You are very good. I rather think that you are afraid I shall find out a secret."

"I? How? Why do you say that!"

"You know very well that no longer ago than last evening, Henri discovered that Miette was concealing a secret very painful to him, and consequently to me."

"Painful to you—to him? I cannot comprehend it."

"What comedy are you playing? Did you not confess everything to Henri?"

"He told you this? Why, I confessed nothing at all."

"You confessed to him that Miette had a lover whom she preferred, and that my son had nothing to do but to retire from the field."

"I confessed that? Never! never! My sister has no other lover. Is it possible that you doubt Miette's uprightness and modesty? A lover at her house when I was not there! If any one but you had said that—"

"Then the person concealed at Vignolette is a woman."

"It cannot be a man; I swear that the thing is impossible, and that it is not true."

"You must, then, be sure of it. You often go to Miette's—"

"I have not put my foot in the house for a month."

"That is strange! Has she forbidden you to go there?"

"I have had no time."

"How is that? You find time to attend all the fairs in the vicinity."

"For my business, not for my pleasure. I am not going to waste my time any longer; it is the solemn truth."

"You are thinking of getting married?"

"Perhaps so."

"With an heiress?"

"With a person whom I have loved for a long time."

"And who is not an idiot?"

"Love an idiot! It's perfectly horrible!"

"You are not like the young man who seeks Mademoiselle de Nives for her fortune, and who does not care whether she knows her right hand from her left. You can conceive the uneasiness of the father who has consulted me on this point. He would think his son dishonored if this were certain."

"It would be a mean, base deed, certainly. But who has circulated this report about Mademoiselle de Nives? It must be her stepmother."

"You are acquainted, then, with her stepmother? Come, tell me what you know."

"But I know nothing at all. I only know what every one says, what you have heard a thousand times. The Count de Nives married an adventuress, who drove away and persecuted the child of his first wife. It is even said that this young girl died in a convent."

"Ah! you thought she was dead?"

"I have heard such a report."

"Very well. I can tell you that she is living, and, if my inferences do not mislead me, for she has escaped from the convent, she is now concealed at Vignolette."

"Ah! she escaped?"

"Yes, young man, with a lover who has very large feet."

Jacques Ormonde looked involuntarily at his feet and then at mine, as if to make a comparison that had never entered his mind before. Perhaps until this moment he had never suspected that there could be the slightest imperfection in any part of his person.

I saw plainly that he was foiled, and that if I pressed him a little further he would tell me everything; but my object was to discover his exact position in regard to the case and not to gain his confidence. I changed the conversation abruptly. "Tell me about your sister," I said. "Is it true that she is angry with Madame Chantebel?"

"My aunt has hurt her feelings very much by giving her to understand that she did not look favorably upon her marriage with Henri."

"I know there is a misunderstanding between them, as there is between Henri and you. I hope everything will be made up, and as you are sure that Miette has formed no other plans—"

"I will take my oath of it."

"Well, I am going to talk with her. Come with me as far as Vignolette."

"I will go half-way, for I have masons here who disarrange all my plans the moment my back is turned."

When we were at a little distance from Vignolette, Jacques begged me to let him return to his work. He seemed afraid to go any farther. I gave him his liberty but, after watching his progress for a little while, I discovered that he was not returning to Champgousse. He made his way stealthily among the vines, as if to watch the result of my visit to his sister.

I whipped up my horse, and made him redouble his pace. I did not wish Jacques to arrive before me by the

narrow footpaths, and to forewarn his sister of my arrival. However, as I must drive around the farm in order to enter it by the carriage-road, I was not certain that with his great limbs and the habits of a sportsman who overcomes all obstacles. he had not been beforehand with me, when, without announcing myself, I entered my niece's garden.

She came to me, with a basket of peaches, freshly gathered, in her hands, and putting them upon a bench, cordially embraced me. "Let us sit down here," I said; "I want to talk to you;" and in order to seat myself I took up a white silk umbrella lined with rose-color, that was lying on the bench. "Is this pretty plaything yours?" I asked. "I did not know you cared for fine things like this."

"No, uncle," she replied, with the frank decision which was at the base of her mind and character. "This plaything is not mine; it belongs to some one who is staying with me."

"And who has run into the house?"

"She will return if you will consent to see her, and hear what she has to say; she wants to talk to you, for last evening I convinced her that this was her wisest course."

"Have you seen your brother to-day?"

"Yes, uncle. I know Henri found out the existence of some secret here. I do not know what he told you, nor what he thinks of it; but I am unwilling to have any secrets with you, and was obliged to tell the person who has trusted hers to me that I would not tell you any falsehoods. You have come to question me, dear uncle; I am ready to answer all your inquiries.

"Indeed, my child," I resumed, "I will only ask you those to which you can reply without betraying any-

thing. I will not demand the name of the person—I believe I know it—neither will I ask to see her. I am interested solely in what concerns your brother and you personally, for it is of great importance that Jacques should not make you an accomplice in a piece of folly the consequences of which will be disagreeable if not serious."

"I assure you, uncle, that I do not understand what you are talking about. Jacques has nothing to do with my decision to receive this person, and protect her as long as it is in my power."

"You say Jacques has nothing to do with it—and you assure me. Emilie, you have never told me an untruth?"

"Never!" replied Miette, with that all powerful expression of truth that needs no proof to impress its claims.

"I believe you, dear girl—I believe you!" I cried. "Thus Mademoiselle de—we will not call her by name—came to you a month since, alone and of her own free will, that is to say, no one brought her to you, persuading her to come here, and no one helped her to escape from the walls of her prison?"

Before replying, Miette hesitated a moment, as if what I said gave birth to a suspicion that had not before occurred to her. "The truth that I can swear to," she replied, "is this: one evening last month I was here alone. Jacques had gone to the fair of Artonne. He had been away more than a week, when I heard some one ringing at the gate. I thought at first it was he, but, while getting up to go to the door, I guessed who it must be; for I had received a letter announcing a plan, a hope of escape, and asking for an asylum and secrecy. I did not arouse my domestics, who were asleep, but I

ran to the door, and found the person I expected. I welcomed her cordially, and led her to the room already prepared for her. Old Nicole was my only confidant, and I am as sure of her fidelity as of my own.

"And this person was alone?"

"No, she was accompanied by Charliette, her nurse, who had planned her escape for a long time and at last succeeded in effecting it."

"What has become of this woman?"

"She did not remain here. She is in Riom, where she is living with her husband. I am not much pleased with her appearance, but she comes to see Marie occasionally, to tell her what her stepmother is doing, for she has taken upon herself to watch her movements."

"Tell me what Jacques did after you had received your friend."

"Jacques returned in two days, but did not see my recluse. I met him on the road, and said to him: 'You must not put your foot in our house, for it would cause a scandal. I have there a friend who cannot see any one. You must sleep at Champgousse. To-morrow I will bring you everything you need, and help you to get settled there. You are anxious to commence building; begin now; do not come home for a month, and preserve the most absolute secrecy.' Jacques promised not to try to see my friend, and not to speak of her to any one. He has kept his word."

"You are sure of it?"

"Yes, uncle, even though you should think I am mistaken," replied Miette, firmly; "I know all the levity for which my brother is reproached, but he is blameless where I am concerned. He feels, indeed, that if he came here he would quickly be accused of paying court to my friend, and that I should play a villanous part."

"What villanous part, my dear? This is the sole point that interests me. What should you think of your situation if Jacques was in love with this young lady?"

"Jacques cannot be; he is not acquainted with her."

"But suppose—"

"That he has deceived me? It is impossible! it would be unpardonable! This young lady is rich, noble, and has a social position above Jacques. If, to make such an alliance possible, he had tried to become acquainted with her, to win her affection, to profit by her abode with me to compromise her character, I should pass for the accomplice of a base intriguer, or for a ridiculous dupe. Is not this your opinion, uncle?"

In my turn I hesitated to reply. The burly Jacques seemed to me both thoughtless and practical enough to deceive his sister. "My darling," I at last said, embracing her, "no one will ever accuse you of being concerned in any intrigue whatever, and, if there were persons ill-advised enough to do so, your uncle and cousin would box their ears."

"But my aunt Chantebel!" replied Miette, with an expression of sorrowful pride. "My aunt is prejudiced against me, and perhaps she has already spread unfavorable reports in regard to me?"

"Your aunt has not heard anything. Forget what she said to you, for she will make amends for her thoughtlessness. I cannot deny that my dear wife is thoughtless; but she is good, and has a high esteem for you."

"She does not love me, uncle; that was plain the last time I saw her, and she has prejudiced Henri's mind against me."

"But am I of no account? I am here, and I love you enough for four. Tell me one thing: do you still love Henri?'

"The Henri as he used to be, yes; but as he is now, I cannot say—I must make his acquaintance over again. He has changed in appearance, language, and manners. It will take time to gain a knowledge of his character, but he cannot come to my house for some weeks, neither can I go to yours; you now understand the reason why."

"Well! put off the examination you wish to make for a few weeks, and answer a final question. Do you know the person to whom you are giving an asylum well?"

"Yes, uncle."

"You love her?"

"Very much."

"And you esteem her?"

"I firmly believe that she has never done anything that merits serious disapprobation."

"Is she intelligent?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well educated?"

"As well educated as one can be in a convent; she reads a great deal now."

"Does she reason soundly?"

"Much more so than the person who has brought her misfortunes upon her, and who still persecutes her."

"Enough! I do not want to know any more at present, neither do I desire to see your friend until I have something important to tell her."

"Ah, uncle!" cried Miette, who was not deficient in penetration—"I guess! You have been consulted; you are commissioned to—"

"I have been consulted, but I am entirely free to act as I decide. I would not enter upon a case where your name would be used in the pleadings for anything in the world: but you may be certain there will be no case, and, if there were, I would refuse to plead against one who is

dependent on, and protected by you. As it is now a question of compromise, I have the right to give good advice to both parties. Tell your friend that she has done a very imprudent thing in quitting her convent when she would so soon have the full right to leave it of her own free will; and let me tell you that, in encouraging her, you have been guilty of a foolish act of which I did not believe you capable."

"No, uncle, I have been deceived by appearances. Marie wrote: 'I am of age, but see no prospect of regaining my liberty. My only resource is in flight, and you are the only person in the world who can give me an asylum. Are you willing to receive me?' I could not refuse. When she arrived, she told me she would not be of age for several weeks. I was well acquainted with Marie, and knew she was a year younger than I, but did not know her birthday. After I found this out, I fully understood that she must be closely concealed, and took all possible precautions. I have succeeded until now. Marie does not go out of the enclosure, and my tenants are reliable and devoted. They do not know her name, have not seen her, and, without being in my confidence, are sufficiently distrustful not to reply to any questions that might be asked them."

"Ah, well! my dear girl, redouble your precautions, for at the present time Mademoiselle Marie is still under her guardian's control. She has power to take her home, or force her to return to the convent—between two gendarmes, as they say!"

"I know it, uncle, I know it! therefore I sleep with one eye open. If such a thing should happen—poor Marie! I would follow her; I should be seen conducted through the country by the gendarmes."

"As Jacques would not endure this—nor I, any more

than he, if I were there—we should be in a fine piece of business. Friendship is a good thing, but I find that your friend has well used, not to say abused, yours."

"She is so unhappy, uncle! If you knew—ah! how I wish she could talk to you, and tell you the story of her life!"

"I do not wish to see her, and I must not. It is impossible for me to be the confidant of her presence here. Remember this would spoil everything, and destroy my power of being useful to you. Now I am going away. I have not seen her, you have not told me her name, I know absolutely nothing. Embrace me, and say to your recluse that she must not even leave her umbrellas in your garden."

"Take this basket of peaches, uncle; my aunt likes them."

"No! Your peaches, though superb, are less velvety and fresh than you are; and, as I shall not speak at home of having seen you, I do not wish to carry anything away. Allow me only to say to Henri that you will consent to renew your acquaintance with him next month?"

"You are going to tell him, then, that you have seen me?"

"Yes, him alone, but he will not know anything of your secret."

"Then, dear uncle, tell him—tell him—tell him nothing; learn, before all else, what my aunt has against me. As long as she feels unkindly towards me, I cannot think of anything."

UNIVERSITY CALIFORNIA

CHAPTER VII.

I RESOLVED to confide nothing of what I had learned to Henri. I felt, however, that I must remove his suspicions of Miette, and console him, for despite his apparent calmness, I knew he was wounded to the depths of his heart, and I feared to see him, both by his conduct and his attitude, render a marriage, in which, I felt, the happiness of his life was bound up, impossible. I returned about three o'clock, and found no one at home. My wife and son had gone to the Tower of Percemont, and I went there to join them.

The plaything decidedly pleased Henri, and his mother was trying to persuade him, under the pretence of his requiring a study, to fit up a comfortable suite of apartments suitable for a bachelor. I did not agree with them. In my opinion, the manor-house ought to be left exactly as it was, the only change advisable being to clean and repair the room which old Coras de Percemont had occupied. "Henri," said I, "whether he marries his cousin Emilie or not, will marry some one in two or three years. Who knows if he will go to live with his wife or remain with us? In the latter case, I suppose his wife will wish to live in the tower; great expense must then be incurred to prepare it for housekeeping and for a family. All that you would do at present would be of no use, and would perhaps have to be undone; do not be in a hurry to throw money away to no purpose."

Henri yielded to my judgment. His mother blamed him for always giving in to me, and never carrying out

any idea that she suggested. "You just promised me," she said, "that you would not think of marrying before you were thirty years old."

After scolding him until she was tired, she left us alone, and I hastened to say to Henri: "I have just been to see Miette. I was sure of it! The person whose presence perplexed you so much at her house last evening was a woman."

"You are sure, father? Why, then did she conceal her?"

"It is a nun from the convent of Riom, whom the physician has ordered to be sent into the country for a while. You know these nuns are cloistered, and must not see any one belonging to the outside world. Whenever a visitor arrives, Miette has promised to give her warning, so that she may take herself out of the way. Miette has also received instructions not to reveal to any one the presence of this nun under her roof, for the rule of the order requires she should live and die in a convent. The bishop, seeing the urgency of the case, granted a dispensation of two months, upon condition that the matter should be kept quiet. I intrust the secret to you, and beg you to say nothing to your mother in regard to it. Miette, very much attached to this nun, who was like a mother to her at the convent, spends her whole time in taking care of her, waiting upon her, and keeping her concealed. As usual, Miette, with the heart of an angel, acts the part of a Sister of Charity."

"What must she think of me for bringing such an accusation against her? Did you tell her what I said?"

"I was not so foolish. She would not readily pardon you; but tears are in your eyes! Tell me frankly if Emilie is not dearer to you than you are willing to own?"

"Father," said Henri, "I feel inclined to weep and to laugh also."

"Laugh and weep as much as you like, but speak!"

"That is difficult. I cannot tell you how I feel when my own mind is not clear to myself. I know that Emilie is an angel—better still; she is a saint; for, if she has the innocence and candor attributed to celestial beings, she has also the merit of a generous and courageous soul that surmounts all trials. It is a glory to be loved by her, a supreme felicity to have her for a wife. You see, I know what she is worth; but am I good for anything? Am I worthy of such a wife? What have I done to deserve her? On the contrary, I have passed, not without stain, through an experience of life of which she has not the least idea, and from which I was compelled to drive away her image to prevent it from making me ashamed of my pleasures. And now I return to her deteriorated and sorrowful. A man should marry at eighteen, father, in the fervor of faith in himself and in the pride of holy innocence. He would then feel himself the equal of his companion, and be sure of meriting her respect. Yes, conjugal love is that austere and sacred thing concerning which it may be said, if it is not all in all, it is nothing.

"Well! I did not understand this until lately, and, when my senses drew me elsewhere, I did not dream that my esteem and respect for Emilie would be lessened. I have since seen my mistake. My worship has grown cold; I am convinced that I never loved her as I ought, since I could forget her. I was fearful of her and of myself: I thought her too much my superior, morally speaking, to receive me with pleasure, and to give herself to me with enthusiasm; I saw in marriage a chain of a frightful seriousness. My imagination reverted to other

types than that of this young girl, who is too perfect for me. I had been corrupted. If I did not drown myself like my cousin Jacques in the dissipation of Paris, I nevertheless lost the taste for simplicity and love for the right path; I put, in fact, too many artificial flowers in my garden of love. I cannot speak to Emilie, I dare not look at her. I shall never know how to gain her love.

"Do you wish me to tell you everything—to confess something absolutely shameful? Yesterday, when I believed her unfaithful, at first my blood ran cold, and then suddenly I became furious. Jealousy tormented me, and I did not close my eyes the whole night. If she had been near me, I should have insulted, perhaps struck her! So that I was madly in love with her when believing her unfaithful. I had the greatest possible trouble to prevent myself from going to see her notwithstanding her prohibition and yours. Now you make plain to me that I have been a madman and a fool, you show me Emilie's image, with its immaculate aureole, and behold me cast down and repentant, but uncertain and fearful. I cannot tell whether I love her or not!"

"That will do, that will do," I replied; "now I understand everything! These things must happen. There is a period of life when fathers with the best intentions are forced to abandon their sons to fate, very happy if they are restored in no worse condition than you are. Accept the past which you cannot change, and do not aggravate its influence by too serious reflections. You have made a voyage where you have been forced to feed on condiments, and now our fruits and milk-diet seem insipid to your taste. You are no longer a Virgilian shepherd. Have patience—these simple pleasures will return. Man is modified according to his sphere; you will appreciate more quickly than you imagine the

conditions of true happiness. Forget for a little while the question of marriage. Emilie does not seem disposed to recall it to your mind. She says you are so changed that she does not feel acquainted with you any longer, and her mind, I plainly see, has no fixed plan in regard to you. You are both absolutely free to recommence the romance of your youth, or to suffer it to be effaced in the rosy clouds of the past."

I am not easily alarmed, neither am I heedless of consequences. I saw plainly that in this, as in everything else, happiness is transitory, and security chimerical. I expected that the day which restored my son to me would be one of the happiest of my life. I was so glad to see him once more, and had such happy dreams when expecting him! In spite of the faults which he freely confessed, and took little pains to conceal in his letters, he had worked hard, and was at the commencement of a career promising a brilliant fortune. He was intelligent, handsome, good, rich, and as reasonable as could be expected from his age and situation. We had near at hand the best girl in the country, rich also, good, beautiful as an angel, and exceptionally intellectual. They loved each other, and had been betrothed from childhood. I expected to see them meet joyfully, and talk of marriage immediately—and already a strange coolness had sprung up between them. My wife, whom I believed amenable to reason, at least on this subject, was diligently working to set them at variance. Miette, through the kindness of her heart, was involved in a questionable adventure. Jacques was carrying on an amorous intrigue which might compromise or bring trouble to his sister; and, worst of all, Henri, troubled and tormented between love and caprice, did not sleep the first night passed under the paternal roof, and was evidently suffering from an inde-

finable mental condition beyond my power to cure. My day of happiness was not unclouded, and, while pretending to smile at these trifling matters, I was considerably worried by them.

CHAPTER VIII.

The evening passed very cheerfully; many relatives and friends dined with us. Henri was a general favorite, and every one congratulated me on the possession of such a son. He received several invitations, but only accepted those where I could accompany him. He had been away so long, he said, that he was determined not to lose sight of me during the vacation.

We accepted for the next day an invitation to a shooting-party, from one of our cousins who lived so far off that we were obliged to be absent from home a couple of days. Jacques Ormonde promised to join the party, but did not come. We scarcely thought of his absence, the sport and the dinner were so animated and enjoyable; but I noticed his evident care in avoiding us. It was very difficult for Jacques to keep a secret, therefore I inferred that he had one, and dreaded my scrutiny. We stayed a day longer than we intended, and did not return until the Monday afternoon.

The object that first attracted my attention, as I bade my wife good-day, was a pretty little girl six or seven years old, full of smiles and play, who clung to her skirts and said to me in a defiant tone :—

"Are you Bébelle's husband?"

"Who is Bébelle? and who is this pretty child?"

"It is Mademoiselle Léonie de Nives," replied my wife, taking her in her arms; "she heard me called Madame Chantebel, and she finds it shorter and prettier to call me Bébelle. Oh! we are already great friends—is it not so, Ninie? We get along famously together."

"But how came you to be acquainted with her?" I asked.

My wife explained the matter, while the child left us to play in the garden. Madame de Nives came the evening before to talk with me, and my wife had gained confidence enough to receive her to the best of her ability. The exquisite toilet and brilliant equipage of the countess had turned her head. Madame did her best to be agreeable and fascinating to the wife of the lawyer whom she wished to secure for her cause. She consented to let her horses stand in the stable for two hours. She walked in the garden, and even went to see the great tower of which Madame Chantebel was proud to do the honors. She admired the locality, the garden, the house, the birds, and promised a pair of real Dutch canaries for the aviary. She deigned to accept a collation of fruit and cake that was served for her; declared that no grapes or pears at Nives bore any comparison with ours; even asked the recipe for the cake. She went away, saying she should return the next day.

She did return, as she promised, with her daughter, expecting to find me at home, as I had appointed to be; but I was never in season. This poor countess had waited for me more than an hour; then, having business at Riom, she had conferred upon my house the distinguished honor of leaving her little girl there, in my wife's arms, and she was now expected every minute. "I hope, M. Chantebel," said my wife, as she finished the story, "that you will have your clothes brushed, for they are covered with

dust, and change your cravat, for it is very much soiled." I noticed that she was richly dressed to receive her new friend.

A little while after, Madame de Nives arrived, and my wife hastened to meet her, leading the little one by the hand. The countess announced to me that she was on her way to Paris, some one having written her that her stepdaughter had been seen entering an hotel in the Faubourg St-Germain, leaning on the arm of a young man very tall and very fair. "The person who gives me this information," she added, "thinks that Marie is still there; at any rate I shall know where she went after leaving this hotel, which is not otherwise designated. People are so afraid of being compromised, or finding themselves implicated in some scandal! I must go myself to find out the truth. I shall act energetically, take Marie by surprise, oblige her to make a statement of her misconduct, and bring her back to replace her triumphantly in the convent."

"You are going too far! Then any reconciliation will be impossible, any concessions on her part hopeless. I have told you, and I repeat it, that misconduct does not involve deprivation of civil rights."

"When I possess her secret, I will bring her to you, M. Chantebel, and you shall lay down the conditions of my silence."

If I had felt certain that, before taking refuge with Emilie, Mademoiselle de Nives, after escaping from the convent, had not been seen in Paris with Jacques, either for her own pleasure or for advice in regard to her position, I should have hastened the departure of the countess. The time she would lose in her useless search for Mademoiselle Marie would be just so much gained for the inhabitants of Vignolette; but, if this journey took place

without Emilie's knowledge, Madame de Nives could trace out the fugitive, and, with the aid of the police, discover the truth. I advised once more patience and prudence. Madame de Nives was, however, determined to have her own way, and took leave of me, saying that to surprise Marie in open criminality was her surest means of safety. Whatever she might say, I saw plainly that she had taken other advice than mine, and had easily found persons disposed to gratify her passion and enter into her views. Her cause became more and more disagreeable to me, and I felt strongly impelled to have nothing to do with it.

I accompanied her only as far as the garden. Another client was waiting for me, and I was occupied with him until dinner-time. What was my surprise when, upon entering the dining-room, I saw the young Leonie de Nives seated in a high chair, that had done service in Henri's childhood, and my wife in the act of tying a napkin around her neck!

Madame de Nives had confided to Madame Chantebel, on the previous evening, all that she had intrused to me as a profound secret. Women have a marvellous facility in becoming intimate, when hatred on one side and curiosity on the other find the savory aliment of a scandal to confide and to listen to. Madame Chantebel was, then, thoroughly versed in all the details of the case, and my astonishment amused her very much. As she could not enter into any explanation before the child, she simply said to Henri and me that "her mamma would return in the evening."

"I asked her to stay and dine with us," said my wife, "but, as she intends to start for Paris this evening or to-morrow morning, she has too much to do at Riom, and begged me to keep her little one until she came for her."

Madame de Nives did not return in the evening. My wife did not appear to be much astonished, and had a little bed arranged near her own for her young guest. After undressing Mademoiselle Ninie, and sitting by her until she went to sleep, she came back to explain the mystery.

Madame de Nives had been obliged to take the five o'clock train for Riom; she was now on her way to Paris. I ought to know that not a moment should be lost in such an important affair as that which engrossed her attention. Madame de Nives had dreaded the tears of her little daughter, whom she could not take with her, and had accepted her offer to keep her until evening. Her nurse would have come with the carriage to take her to Nives, but she had shown much anxiety on account of this nurse, having discovered on that very day that she was carrying on an intrigue at Riom. "The servants of this poor lady," my wife said, "were not as faithful as they should be. Her domestic arrangements had not prospered at the chateau since her husband's death. The old servants took the side of the elder daughter. She was obliged to turn them out of the house, but they left behind their evil influence and their wicked insinuations; it was useless to take these servants to Paris: at the least discontent they became insolent, and talked to Ninie about her sister Marie, driven away and shut up in a convent on her account. All this irritated the child, and during the last absence of the countess many things were said to the little girl that made her unhappy and disobedient when her mother returned. It appears, also, that Madame de Nives's neighbors are not on good terms with her. She has neither relatives nor friends; she is truly an object of pity.

"While listening to her grievances, which aroused my

sympathy, the idea came into my head of proposing to take care of the little one. 'If the nurse has behaved improperly, you cannot trust the child to her any longer. Give her to me; you know who I am, and with what indulgence I brought up my son and the other two dear ones I lost. You say that you will be absent but a week at most. What is it for us to take care of the child for a week? It will be a pleasure to me. Trust me to dismiss your bad nurse when she comes back, and to find another for whom I will be responsible as for myself.' She was inclined to accept my offer, but dared not on your account; she said; 'My child is noisy, and will annoy M. Chantebel.' 'Nonsense!' I replied; 'you do not know him! He is a patriarch! He is good as bread, and adores children.' At last I urged her so much that she left me her darling, who is a love of a child. The poor woman was so touched that she wept and embraced me when she bade me good-by."

"Is it possible, wife, you have been embraced by a countess! That is the reason why I find a more noble expression on your face than usual."

"You are making fun of me! It is unsufferable! It is of no use to try any longer to talk reasonably with you, M. Chantebel; you are——"

"Insufferable, you said."

"No; you are the best of men, you cannot blame me for having received a poor child who needs to be taken care of and watched over during her mother's absence."

"God keep me from it!—especially as you pay me compliments which I have no desire to change for reproaches. The child does not make me angry: a child never annoys me. Keep her as long as you please; but let me tell you that your countess is a regular fraud."

"A fraud! How disrespectful you speak of the Coun-

tess de Nives. What manners you sometimes have, M. Chantebel!"

"Yes I have the bad manners and the bad taste to think that a reasonable mother does not trust her child, even for a week, to a person whom she has known only since last evening, and that, if among all her former connections she had neither a devoted relative, nor a sincere friend, nor a faithful servant, it must be her own fault."

"You are right. I would not have trusted Henri to strangers in this way; but I am not unknown to Madame de Nives. She has heard me spoken of often enough to know that I have always been a good mother and an irreproachable wife."

"It is not I who will say anything to the contrary; but this sudden confidence astonishes me none the less."

"There are exceptional circumstances; and you ought to know that the future of the child depends upon the result of her mother's visit to Paris."

"She told you, then—"

"Everything."

"She did wrong."

"I promised to keep the secret."

"God grant that you may keep your word! for I warn you that, if your new friend brings reproach upon the reputation of her stepdaughter, she is ruined."

"Oh, no! This stepdaughter is a wretched being who——"

"You do not know her! Keep the epithets that will be appropriate for the time when we find out whether she is a victim or a fiend."

CHAPTER IX.

THE next day, Mademoiselle Ninie's nurse not having made her appearance, my wife found an excellent servant-girl whose parents lived near, and with whom we were well acquainted, to take her place. The little girl seemed to be very happy with us.

I was curious to know her feelings in regard to her half-sister. One morning I saw her alone in the garden; my wife, busy with her work, was sitting at one of the lower windows, and watching the little girl at her play. I went into the garden, took the child by the hand, and led her to see some rabbits in a little enclosure where they were kept. When she had admired them for some time, I took her on my knee, and began to talk to her. "You must have, at Nives," I said, "much more beautiful rabbits than these?"

"No, there are no rabbits at all. There are only hens, dogs, and cats; but mamma will not let me play with them for fear that I shall soil or tear my clothes, and this makes me angry, for I am very fond of animals. Mamma scolds me for loving them, because she is stingy."

"Stingy! What does that word mean?"

"Ah, dear me! I don't know. The servants call her so, because she is always scolding them."

"That is a bad word. You must never repeat words that you do not know the meaning of. I am sure your mamma loves you very much, and that she is very good to you."

"She is not good at all. She whips me and smacks me, and I only amuse myself when she goes away."

"Have you any brothers and sisters?"

"I have a grown-up sister who is very good. I should like to live with her always."

"Always! Do you not see her often?"

"No; she is in prison in a convent. I saw her—I mean I saw her portrait. I think I never saw her."

"Then how do you know that she is good?"

"My nurse and the old gardener's wife told me that she was put in prison because she was."

"What! put in prison because she is good?"

"So it seems. Therefore, when mamma tells me to be good I answer: 'No; you would make me go to prison in the same way!' I am very glad she brought me to your house. I hope you will let me stay here always."

Then without waiting for my reply, Mademoiselle Ninie, whom I had hard work to hold, ran after the rabbits faster than ever. I saw a child already the victim of misfortune and a wanderer from the right path. I no longer doubted that her mother was both avaricious and wicked. It was even possible that she saw in her daughter only a pretext for contesting Marie's inheritance with greater avidity. She had not even the resource of hypocrisy, the power of making dupes; for she was thoroughly detested; and her servants had disturbed if not irretrievably injured, the moral sense of poor Ninie.

I looked with painful emotion upon this bewitching child, clothed in all the physical beauty of her happy age, and thought that there was already a gawning worm in the heart of this rose. I watched her closely to discover the ruling impulses of her character: they were good and tender. She ran after the rabbits in order to caress them, and, when she had succeeded in catching one, she

covered it with kisses and tried to swaddle it in her handkerchief, to make a baby of it. As the animal was unmanageable, and threatened to scratch her pretty face, I took him away gently, without opposition on her part, and gave her a tame dove, which made her wild with delight. At first she squeezed it very closely, but when I made her understand that she must let it go free in order to have the pleasure of seeing it come back and follow her of its own accord, she listened to me willingly, and handled it gently; but there was an ardor in her caresses that revealed a heart full of unrequited love and repressed sensibility.

The following day, St. Hyacinth's day, was my birthday, and also our village festival. Two or three dozen cousins and nephews arrived with their wives and children to pass the holiday with us. They went to participate in the rural fete, while my wife, up with the dawn, prepared a Homeric feast. I was absorbed as usual with a crowd of clients—prosperous peasants or humble citizens—who, taking advantage of the holiday to consult me, deprived me of the pleasure of being present at the festival.

I endured the long and confused explanations of these worthy persons until the first bell rang for dinner. Then I resolutely put them out of doors, not without a struggle on the stairway against their references and repetitions. When I entered the drawing-room, shutting the door in their faces, I met with an agreeable surprise. Emilie Ormonde was waiting for me, with a large bouquet of magnificent roses in her hand. The dear child threw herself into my arms, wishing me a pleasant birthday, with happiness, good fortune, and health.

"This" I said pressing her to my heart, "is a great

enjoyment which I did not expect. Have you been here long, my dear niece?"

"I have just arrived, uncle, and I am going away immediately. You must excuse me from dining with you as in other years; but you know why I cannot. Marie is imprudent; she is tired of being shut up. The poor child has been a prisoner so long! Would you believe that this morning she took it into her head to disguise herself as a peasant to come to the fete? She said no one knows her face, and she wanted to accompany me as a servant. The only way I could dissuade her from her purpose was by promising to be gone but an hour. I could not let the day pass without bringing you some Vignolette roses, nor without telling you to-day, as always, that you and Jacques are the two persons whom I love the best in the world."

"And your aunt?"

"I have not seen her. I will pay my respects to her as I go out."

"How will you explain the reason why you do not stay?"

"She will not care to have me stay, uncle."

"And if I allow you to go, will you imagine that I do not love you any longer?"

"Oh! it is different with you! And besides you know I have a child to take care of."

"An unreasonable child, I am sure of it! Do you know that her stepmother was here two days ago?"

"Yes; I knew also that she left her little girl with you."

"Who told you so?"

"Old Nicole's daughter, who came yesterday to bring back some baskets you had lent us. She saw the child,

and was told that the mother had gone to Paris. Is it true?"

"It is true, and Mademoiselle Marie runs a great risk of being discovered, if, after escaping from the convent, she were seen in Paris before coming to your house."

"She was there, uncle; I know it now. She was obliged to purchase underclothing and dresses, and especially to seek counsel in her affairs, concerning which she had always been kept in entire ignorance."

"She was in Paris—alone?"

"No, with her nurse, the one who helped her to escape. This woman is devoted to her, and yet I am afraid of her; she does not understand the necessity of being prudent; she suspects nothing, and, when she comes to see Marie, I do not dare to leave her alone in the house with her."

"But where is Jacques all this time?"

"He must be at the dance, and doubtless he will come and dine with you."

"That is right! Go, then, if you must. I hope you will make ample amends to me when you are no more the guardian slave of your beautiful friend. Have you seen Henri?"

"No; I have seen and wish to see no one but you. Adieu until we meet again, dear uncle!"

The second bell rang for dinner as my niece went away through the farmyard, where she had left her vehicle in charge of a domestic. Henri, who passed through the garden, did not see her. The crowd of nephews, cousins, second-cousins, and grand-nephews arrived, and at last came Jacques Ormonde, red as a peony from having danced until the last minute. The dinner was not very tedious for a family repast in the

country; it was well known that I did not like to sit long at table. It was served promptly, and did not allow of the guests going to sleep while they were eating. As soon as it was finished, feeling the need of breathing the out-door air, after the confinement my clients had imposed upon me in the morning, I proposed to go and take coffee at old Rosier's, who kept a rustic establishment in the village. We could see the dances and diversions from his garden. My proposition was enthusiastically welcomed by my young nieces and cousins. We set off laughing, shouting, frisking about, and singing. The village was only half a mile from the house, taking the paths through my meadows.

Our boisterous arrival brought all the young people out of the wine-shops. They were getting ready to light up, for it was becoming dark. They called the fiddlers, scattered around in the cabarets, together. The young folks who came with me cared little for drinking coffee; they wished to dance. The fete brightened up very much. The dance, abandoned for a time, was reorganized, as is usually the case when hunger is appeased and the evening begins.

During this quarter of an hour of impatient expectation and joyful disorder, I chanced to be alone for a few minutes on old Rosier's terrace. This terrace was a little garden, planted with hazel-bushes, on the declivity of a hill, and about six feet above the level of the place where they were dancing. It was much the prettiest place for obtaining a general view of the fete. Three blue lanterns concealed in the foliage gave the appearance of moonlight, and made it easy for persons to recognize each other. The illumination had, however, not commenced, and I was waiting in the obscurity until my turn came to be served, when I perceived some one ap-

proaching with a stealthy step, who touched me lightly on the shoulder.

"Don't say a word, uncle; it is I, Emilie."

"What are you doing here, dear child? I thought you had gone home."

"I have been home—and come back, uncle. Are we alone here?"

"Yes, just at this moment; but speak low."

"Yes, certainly! I must tell you that I did not find Marie at Vignolette. Nicole told me that Charliette came in my absence, and that they went out together."

"Well! you think they are here?"

"Yes, I think so; and I am looking for them."

"In this way, entirely alone among these peasants flushed with wine, many of whom are not acquainted with you, for they come here from all parts of the country?"

"I am not afraid of anything, uncle. There are enough who are acquainted with me to protect me in case of need. Besides, Jacques will be here, and I thought you would take care of me."

"Then do not leave me, and let your madcap friend follow her own adventures. It is not right that, to save a person who does not wish to be saved, you should expose yourself to insult. Remain with me. I will not allow you to take care of Mademoiselle Marie. Jacques is here to take care of her in your place and in his own way."

"Jacques does not know her, uncle. I assure you—"

I interrupted Miette by making a sign for her to observe a couple moving stealthily along the rock below us in the thick shade that the hazel-bushes threw upon the lower ground-plot. I recognized Jacques's voice. We

remained motionless, listening, and heard the following dialogue:-

"No; I will not go back yet. I want to dance the *bourree* with you. It is dark; and, besides, no one knows me."

"They will soon light up, and every one will notice you."

"Why?"

"You ask the reason? Do you believe there is another peasant girl here as fair, as slender, as pretty as you are?"

"You are flattering me. I will tell Miette."

"You had better not boast of my acquaintance!"

"I know it is not worth speaking of."

"Cruel creature! Come, call Charliette, and go home with her."

"It is you who are cruel! How can you refuse me this little enjoyment?"

"My uncle is here, and you know that he is your stepmother's adviser."

"That makes no difference to me; he will be mine if I wish. When he knows me, he will be on my side. You said so yourself. Come. Jacques, here are the bagpipes coming. I must dance."

"It is absolute madness!"

"Oh, to dance the *bourree* as in my childhood! To have been ten years in a dungeon, to escape from the icy coldness of death, to feel myself alive, and to dance the *bourree*! Jacques, my good Jacques, I have set my heart upon it!"

The noisy music of the bagpipes interrupted the conversation, or prevented us from hearing it. The large lantern at the top of the pole was at last lighted, and old Rosier's garden was also illuminated. I saw all my

guests; those who were not dancing were taking the coffee I had ordered, while the young men, scattered over the open space, were inviting their partners for the dance.

I moved a few steps out of the way with Emilie, in such a manner as to prolong my tete-a-tete with her, without ceasing to observe what was taking place on the green. When the lantern burned brightly, we saw very distinctly the burly Jacques bounding in the dance and lifting in his arms a slender and pretty peasant-girl, very gracefully attired.

"It is indeed she!" said Emilie, in consternation; "it is Marie, disguised!"

"You begin to think that she is a little acquainted with your brother?"

"I was deceived, uncle—ah! very much deceived! He has done wrong."

"And now what are you going to do?"

"Wait until her fancy is gratified, approach her, speak to her gently as to a domestic in my service, and take her home before she has attracted too much attention."

"Wait until I look at her."

"Do you think she is pretty, uncle?"

"Yes, indeed; very pretty, and she dances admirably."

"Look at her critically, uncle; you will see that she is a child, utterly unconscious of what she is doing. I am certain that she has not the least idea of causing me or any one else trouble. It is possible that she has become acquainted with Jacques without my knowledge; that he has helped her to escape, accompanied her to Paris, as you think, brought her even to my door, and seen her secretly since; that they love each other, are betrothed, and have deceived me to avoid the obstacle of my conscientious scruples."

"It is even certain now."

"Very well, uncle, it matters little; Marie is still pure, and more ignorant than I am; for I know from what danger a girl twenty-two years old must be kept, while she—is still like a child of twelve! In the convent she learned nothing of those things she needs most to know at the present time. She is just the same as I left her at the Riom convent, fond of movement, noise, freedom, and dancing, but not suspecting that she can become blameworthy, and incapable of permitting any impropriety in Jacques."

"However, my dear Miette, when Mademoiselle de Nives was at the convent, and only fourteen or fifteen years old, she had a lover who wrote her letters badly spelled, and this lover was Jacques."

"No, uncle, this lover—must I tell you?—it was an entirely innocent affair."

"Tell me everything."

"Well, this lover was your son—it was Henri."

"Are you in earnest?"

"Yes, I saw the letters, and recognized the writing. Henri was then at college, the grounds of which were only separated by a wall from the convent; the students threw balls over the walls, and concealed letters in them, declarations of love, of course, in prose or verse, with full signatures, and addressed at random to Louise, Charlotte, Marie. Henri was delighted with this sport, and excelled in writing in the style of a shoemaker, with a corresponding orthography. He signed his name *Jaquet*, and addressed his burlesque loveletters to Marie, who made fun of them. He knew her Christian name, for he often heard it called out in our garden; but did not take the trouble to find out whether she was pretty or not, for neither at this time nor since has he ever seen her face. She told me the whole story."

"You are sure that he never saw her? I have my doubts—look, Miette, look."

The *bourree* was finished; the dancers were going to commence again, and, at the moment when Jacques was about to lead out his partner, Henri, addressing her, invited her for the next dance. She accepted, regardless of Jacque's visible disapprobation. She took my son's arm, and danced with him, manifesting as much enjoyment as when dancing with my nephew.

"Well! what does this prove?" said the good Emilie, without any appearance of vexation. "Henri has noticed this pretty girl, and said to himself, that, since Jacques has danced with her, he could do the same. Permit me, uncle, to go near her, for she begins to make a sensation, and every one will be asking her to dance. I must take her away. Charliette is here—I see her; but she spoils her, and will allow her to remain long enough to attract too much attention."

"Go, then; but all this annoys me excessively. This girl is possessed. She will cause you a thousand cares, will certainly injure your reputation. Meantime, she dances with Henri, while, excepting for her presence under your roof, he would have renewed the tender and serious pledge of your mutual affection, and to-day he would have opened the ball with his betrothed, instead of dancing with a fair unknown, whose beautiful eyes may perhaps arouse his passionate admiration but will not be able to gain a permanent hold upon his heart."

"Who knows?" said Miette, with a profound expression of sorrowful resignation.

"Who knows?" I exclaimed. "I know that I will not suffer the least coquetry between your and your brother's betrothed!"

"Uncle, do not betray her!" quickly replied the

generous girl. "Whatever happens, I have promised to devote myself to her service, both as a sister and a mother. I will keep my word."

An unexpected incident interrupted us. Jacques Ormonde, seeing Mademoiselle de Nives wild with excitement, and regardless of consequences, contrived a plan for interrupting the ball. He climbed up to the large lantern, as if he were going to light his cigar, and put it out, apparently without intention, plunging the assembly into darkness. As he descended, he pretended to laugh loudly at the accident, and was lost in the slight tumult it produced. There were a few moments of astonishment and disorder. Some continued to dance, feigning to mistake their partners; others were honestly looking for theirs. Some modest girls, frightened, sought the protection of their parents; others, more bold, laughed and shouted as loud as they could. I descended from the terrace with Miette; at the moment when the light was rekindled, we saw Jacques, wandering, disappointed, looking around among the different groups; Henri and Mademoiselle de Nives had disappeared, either with or without Charliette.

I saw then that Miette still loved Henri, for great tears glistened for a minute on her cheeks. She tried to conceal them, and, turning towards me, "We must," she said, "prevent Jacques from making any further search. He cannot conceal his feelings, and his anxiety will be noticed."

"Never fear," I replied, "Jacques knows very well how to keep his own counsel; you cannot doubt it any longer. He will take good care, if he is jealous, not to pick a quarrel with Henri, for this would betray or avow everything. If Mademoiselle de Nives has chosen Henri for her attendant, and he takes her back to Vignolette,

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you must not let them see that you are uneasy or jealous."

"Certainly not, uncle, I am neither; but—"

"But here is Jacques, who sees you, and is coming towards us. It is not the time for explanations; appear to be ignorant of everything. Presently I will make him confess."

"I did not expect the pleasure of seeing you," said Jacques to Emilie; "you told me you were not coming to the fete.."

"I have just come," replied Miette. "I had something to say to my uncle. I knew that he would be here this evening."

"And you have seen—only him?" said Jacques, almost distracted.

"Only him? Indeed, I have seen a great many people."

"I thought you were looking for some one?"

"I was looking for no one but my uncle, and you see plainly that I have found him. What is the matter with you, and why do you look so troubled?"

Jacques saw that he had betrayed himself, and hastened to reply with a forced air of gayety:—"I am not troubled about anything! I am looking for Henri, that he may be my *vis-a-vis* in the dance—with you, if you wish."

"Thanks, I am going away. My vehicle is waiting for me under the pines yonder. Please tell old Pierre to put the bridle on the mare. I will follow you."

"Why are you hurrying away?" I asked my niece, as soon as Jacques had started off. "Henri is here, without doubt, and, if you desire it, will dance with you."

"Uncle, Henri has gone with Marie; they are on their way to Vignolette."

"It is possible—everything is possible: but upon reflection, it is very improbable; you said they did not know each other? Do you now think your young charge so foolish and imprudent as to have made Henri her confidant?"

"I know nothing about the matter, my dear uncle; I do not understand her any longer!"

"She is coquettish and frivolous, that is plain; however—"

"They were talking with much earnestness during the *bourree* and yesterday Marie wrote a letter which she intrusted to the letter-carrier with great secrecy."

"You suppose—what?"

"She has a great desire to see you and ask your advice. I was obliged to tell her of your refusal. She then questioned me more than she had ever done before about Henri, his character, and the influence he possessed over you. I should not be surprised if she had commissioned him to ask you for an interview."

"If she wrote to him yesterday, he would have spoken to me to-day. I believe you are mistaken; whatever it is, we shall see very soon. If she has selected him for an intermediary, he will tell me so this evening. Now, what are you going to do?"

"Return home quietly at a slow pace. As Marie is probably going home on foot, I want to give her time to return to Vignolette, take off her disguise, and go to bed without telling me anything, unless she pleases. You understand, uncle? If she confesses her inconsiderate act, I shall have a right to scold her and question her. If she wants to conceal it from me, I cannot reproach her without making her angry and humiliating her very much. Remember she is under my roof, and has no other asylum; if I offend her, she will leave me, and where then would

she go? To Charliette's, whom I believe capable of anything? No, she must not quit me, for she would compromise herself, and give her stepmother the means of destroying her reputation!"

"In this, as in everything, you are as wise as you are generous, my dear Emilie. Say nothing to her, if she is silly enough to wish to deceive you; but I will speak to Jacques! Never mind! he will not dream that you heard his conversation with the damsel."

We arrived at this moment under the pines where, owing to want of room in the inn, a number of horses were tied to the trees. Jacques had not troubled himself particularly about delivering his sister's message to the old servant. He was searching in all directions, looking always for Mademoiselle de Nives, and finding it very difficult to obtain information in any other way than by his eyes, which were of little use to him in the thick shade of the pine-grove. Obliged to come at my call, he helped me in seeing Emilie safely started for home. Then taking his arm, I led him to an unfrequented path, and said:—"Let us see, young man, what you intend to do, and what will be the end of this fine intrigue."

In three words I convinced him I knew everything, and that it was perfectly useless to deny it. He drew a long breath, and replied:—"Oh uncle! you confound me; but you release me from torture, and excepting for the penalty of being severely scolded, I am delighted at the opportunity of telling you the truth."

CHAPTER X.

"I was in love with Mademoiselle de Nives," said Jacques, "when she was at the Riom convent. I had left college for a long time, though Henri was still there, and was intending to go to Paris to commence my law-studies. I was passing my vacation at our town house, and from one of the dormer-windows of the loft frequently saw Mademoiselle de Nives standing at the window of her cell looking out upon the convent-garden. It is true, she was but fourteen years old; but she was already beautiful as an angel; and at the age I had then reached admiration for beauty may really be called love. But I was too little accustomed to persons of her condition to think of making a declaration of my passion, and if by chance she turned her head in my direction I quickly hid where she could not see me.

"One Sunday Henri, who came to pay me a visit, not finding me in the house, took it into his head to look for me up in the loft, where he discovered me absorbed in contemplation, and made fun of me. I hurried him from the room in great haste, lest he should see the beautiful charmer who occupied my thoughts. As, however, he persisted in teasing me with epigrams, I confessed that I was in love with a certain Marie in the convent. The malicious fellow took it into his head, to write ridiculous letters to her under the signature of 'Jacques,' and she imprudently made fun of them with her companions. They laughed too loud, and the nuns, who kept watch, seized the balls, in which were concealed the love-letters,

thrown over the college-wall. Madame de Nives was informed of this grave offence. She used it as a pretext for transferring Marie to the convent of Clermont, where she passed a most unhappy youth.

"She will tell you herself what she suffered, uncle; for she has set her heart upon seeing you and asking your advice and protection. You must, indeed, listen to her. During this time I forgot her, willing or not, for I was in Paris, and my childish dreams gave place to more serious realities. However, I learned how much the poor girl was to be pitied through my fault and Henri's. He knew nothing about it, as Miette only told me, and sometimes she showed me her friend's letters, which gave me great pain; but what could I do to repair the injury? I was not an eligible match for her, and could not ask her hand in marriage; besides, the countess did not wish her to be married. She was determined to force her to become a nun, pretending that her stepdaughter wished to devote herself to a religious life, and rejected the idea of marriage.

"Chance alone could bring about the events that followed. I found myself thoughtlessly involved in a romance, and obliged to accept the part assigned me. Two years since, I was at Clermont on account of an affair of which it is unnecessary for me to speak. All the hotels were full, as it was during the assizes. I was passing through the streets with my valise in my hand in search of a lodging, when I met Charliette face to face. I had a vague idea that this woman, married and settled at Riom, had been Mademoiselle de Nives's nurse, but I was ignorant that she had remained faithful to her charge as a dog to its master. I did not even know that, on account of this devotion, she and her husband had since taken up their residence at Clermont. I repeat it, and I solemnly

assure you, my dear uncle, that chance alone has been the powerful agent in all that concerns me.

"Charliette had been pretty; she has still a fresh and agreeable countenance. I had been civil to her at an age when I had no idea of anything else. We were, therefore, very well acquainted, and I was glad to meet her. I confided my embarrassment to her, asking if she knew of any furnished room that would answer my purpose.

"'You need not go far,' she replied: 'I have a furnished room that is very clean. I do not use it, and I shall ask you no rent for it—too happy to render a service to a countryman, and especially to Mademoiselle Miette's brother, for she is so good and ready to render any one a service. Come and see if the lodging suits you.'

"I followed her down a narrow, dark lane, bordered on either side by high walls, and entered into an old house more picturesque than pleasant; but the chamber in question answered my purpose, and Charliette's husband offered it to me so cordially that, lest I should hurt the feelings of these worthy persons, I immediately took possession. I intended to have my dinner at a hotel, but they would not hear of it. Charliette said that she had formerly been cook at the Chateau de Nives, and was sure she could suit me. In truth, her cooking was excellent; but I am not aristocratic, and do not like to eat alone. I accepted only on condition of having my hosts at my table, and of seeing them served at my expense in the same manner as I was.

"The same night I went out to meet some one, taking a key of the house with me. This does not interest you, uncle; but I am obliged to tell you in order to explain the conversation I had with Charliette the next evening. Her husband had gone to the workshop, and I was sitting at the table with her, tasting a quince-cordial of her mak-

ing that had been bottled at least ten years, when she said to me: 'Are you going to run away again this evening, and return at three o'clock in the morning? Poor fellow! your health will be ruined by such late hours; it would be far better for you to marry and settle down quietly. Have you never thought of it?'

"'No, indeed,' I answered. 'I have not yet exhausted the pleasures of youth.'

"'But when you have, it will be too late, and you will find nothing but a rejection of your offers. If you will be reasonable, even while you are still young and handsome, I can perhaps make a match for you beyond your hopes.'

"At first I laughed at Charliette, but she insisted so much, that at length I was forced to listen to her. She talked of a fortune of more than a million, and a young girl of noble birth whom I already knew, since I had been in love with her. 'Ah!' said I, 'can it be possible that you are speaking of the little De Nives?'

"'The little De Nives,' she replied, 'is now a young lady nineteen years old, beautiful and good as an angel.'

"'But she is in the convent?'

"'Yes, on the other side of this wall against which you are leaning.'

"'Indeed.'

"It is just as I tell you. This old house, where we are, forms one of the outbuildings of the convent. I settled here as a tenant soon after Mademoiselle Marie was shut up in the convent. I promised to follow her, and we arranged beforehand a plan of action. I knew how to play my part, although I could not conceal that I had been her nurse. The nuns, who wished to force her to take the veil, distrusted me a little when I asked for work, and questioned me adroitly to find out whether I should en

courage the resistance of the young novice. I was more shrewd than they were: I replied that Marie was altogether wrong, that theirs was the happiest condition in life, and that I had always advised her to adopt it. They brought us face to face; but we were on our guard. She received me very coldly, and I accosted her in the harsh tone of a devotee determined to preach her a sermon. She declined to listen to me. The farce was well played. The nuns thought a great deal of me, and intrusted me with the washing of the linen for the chapel. I did it so well, and showed myself so assiduous in the performance of convent duties, that I was soon looked upon as one of the regular servants of the community, and was free to go where I wished, and communicate as much as I pleased with Marie. If you will go upstairs with me I will reveal a secret that you must not betray. Your sister is the best friend of my dear little one, and you would not wish to add to her unhappiness.'

"I swore to keep the secret, and went up a little breakneck staircase lighted by a candle that Charliette held. I found myself in an old loft, where, albs, surplices, and linen garments, embroidered or trimmed with lace, were hung to dry on lines arranged for the purpose.

"'See,' said Charliette, 'this is my work, and the way I earn my living. The abbés who officiate in the nuns' chapel say that nowhere else do they find vestments so white, well-starched, and smelling so sweet; but this does not interest you. Wait! you are here in the interior, or nearly so, of the convent, for the door that you see above those four steps communicates directly with the bell-turret of the chimes that announce the services. My husband, who is piously inclined, has been engaged to keep these bells in order, and repair them, when necessary. He has a key to this door, which he would not

trust to me during the night for anything in the world; but the dear man must sleep, and, when I want the key, I shall have it. And, when Marie desires to, she shall pass through this door to make her escape! Do you understand me now?'

"I understood only too well; and the thought of such a fine adventure almost drove me crazy. My amusements in the town seemed altogether tame beside it, and I did not go out that night. I talked all the evening with Charliette, who came back to renew the conversation after her husband had gone to bed. This devil of a woman wrought me up to such a state of excitement—I do not wish to conceal anything from you, uncle—that, if the thing had been possible at that moment, I would have carried Marie off at once, regardless of the future.

"But Mademoiselle de Nives's consent had to be obtained, and as yet she knew nothing of the matter. Charliette's plan had been improvised on seeing me. I had therefore several days during which to reflect upon the undertaking, and a crowd of objections rose in my mind. That young lady who did not know me, whose sole idea of my person rested upon the memory of those absurd letters that she perhaps still attributed to me—that girl of noble birth, so rich, and probably so proud, would most certainly reject Charliette's suggestions. You may imagine my surprise when the next evening Charliette said to me: 'Everything works well; she did not say "No;" she wants to see you first; she well knows that you are considered the handsomest man in our part of the country—but she has never seen you. Go on Sunday morning to mass at the convent; she will be behind the curtain, so situated that she can look at you; only appear very collected, and do not raise your eyes from your prayer-book. I will lend you one; be-

sides, I shall be near you to see how you behave. You must be prudent."

"I was very prudent, no one seemed to notice me, and Marie had a good opportunity to gratify her curiosity. In the evening Charliette showed me a letter from her that I know almost by heart. It said: 'My good friend, I have seen him; I do not know whether he is witty or handsome—I am no judge of that—but he looks kind, and I know from his sister that he has an excellent character. As to marrying him, that requires time for reflection. Tell him to come back in a year; if he is still decided, perhaps I shall then be the same; but I will make no promise, and I wish him to know this.'

"I could have wished for a shorter probation—but I must abridge the story so as not to bore you. Charliette could not obtain a more favorable answer, and I returned home very much absorbed in my romance. At the end of the year of trial—that is, last year—I returned secretly to Clermont, and quietly took possession of my room in Charliette's house. I said nothing to my sister, in compliance with Marie's formal commands; moreover I was sure that Miette would not plead my cause. I learned, however, through her, that she was the confidante of Marie's desire to escape from the convent, and that she had entreated her to be patient until she became of age, offering her an asylum in her house so soon as she was legally free. This did not favor my suit, for Marie, no longer needing my assistance when she became of age, would not have the least reason for choosing me in preference to any one else.

"However, my submission to the trial imposed, and my fidelity in returning at the appointed hour to receive her orders, pleaded for me. This time I had an interview with her in Charliette's loft. I was dazzled with

her beauty; she was dressed as a novice, in white from head to foot, and as pale as her veil: but such eyes, mouth, and hands! I lost all control of myself in my passionate admiration, and, in spite of Charliette's presence, who did not leave her, I found words to declare my love.

"'It is as I feared,' she said; 'you expect an answer, and if I do not say "Yes" immediately, you will hate me.'

"'No,' I replied; 'I shall suffer much, but I will still submit a little.'

"'Only a little? Very well! listen; I believe in you now, and rely on your assistance in escaping from this convent, where I am slowly dying, as you plainly see; but I have no desire to be married at present, and I will only accept a man who loves me with the most absolute disinterestedness. If you are that man, you must prove it, by giving me your aid unconditionally.'

This decision did not alarm me; it is strange if a man cannot make himself loved if he wishes it, when he is as good looking as another. I promised all that she demanded She told me that she wished, as soon as she escaped from the convent, to take refuge with Miette, and to see me there secretly until she became better acquainted with me; but she knew Miette would oppose every plan for a marriage between us, and she must not be allowed to have any suspicion of the contemplated arrangement. Marie was also sure of her willingness to receive her. 'I no longer fix any date,' she added, 'for I have already received proofs of your honor and devotion. When circumstances permit me to regain my liberty, I will send you this little ring that you see on my finger. It will say: "I am waiting for you; take me to your sister."

"Ever since this interview, I have been more in love with Marie than ever, and I assure you, uncle, that no other woman has occupied my thoughts. My second probation was much longer than I anticipated, almost as long as the first. I learnt, from Charliette, who came and passed one day at Riom, that Miette insisted in her letters that Marie should wait until she was twenty-one years old. It was through Charliette that the two friend corresponded.

"I was almost discouraged as the epoch drew near, and thought, unless I carried her off, I should never be anything to her but a friend. However, one fine morning, about two months since, I received the gold ring, slender as a hair, carefully folded in a letter! I set out, I ran, I flew, I arrived at the place appointed—"

"And you carried her away? Then the story is finished!"

"No, uncle, it only commences."

"I understand very well; but there are confidences I do not wish to receive, or some vain boasting that I will not listen to."

"Neither the one nor the other, uncle; I will tell you the truth; Mademoiselle de Nives is still, as before, entitled to every one's respect."

"That does not concern me."

"Which means that you doubt it! Well, will you believe me when I say that I behaved, not like the buffoon to whom you often do me the honor to compare me, but like the clown who draws the chestnuts out of the fire for—"

"For whom?"

"For the harlequin."

"Who is the harlequin?'

"Can you not guess?"

"No, unless you are jealous of Henri because he danced with the pretty peasant girl this evening."

"Yes, I am very jealous, for there is something else.'

"Then go on; I will listen to you."

"I arrived at Clermont *incognito*. I alighted, threaded my way carefully, and slipped stealthily into Charliette's house at night; I then gave expression to my joy and gratitude.

"'Listen to me,' she said; 'fine words are only words. I am engaged in a matter that may have serious results, and, if my husband does not kill me when he finds out what I have done, he will at least beat me. You are going to run away with a girl who is a minor. Her stepmother will make a public scandal of the affair; there will, perhaps, be a lawsuit, in which I shall be implicated—at all events, driven from the convent where I have a good place, that is, the means of earning my living! I know very well that Mademoiselle Marie, who is rich, will reward me generously for all that I do for her; but there is my husband, who knows nothing and will countenance nothing. This will not prevent him from losing his employment at the convent and being obliged to leave the neighborhood on account of the stir that will be made. Will you not make some sacrifice on your side for my poor husband, who may not find another situation for a long time? I am a poor ignorant woman, and do not know anything about business; I do not even know if Mademoiselle Marie will be able to do me all the good she wishes to; this is why I have put you in communication with her, you who are so rich and generous! However, ideas change sometimes; and should you forget or disown my services, you have bound yourself by no engagement, you have offered me nothing, promised me nothing.'

"I spare you the details, uncle. You must have foreseen, while listening to me, what then happened. I was simple enough never to have thought of it. I had indeed said to myself that there is no absolutely Platonic disinterestedness in this world, and that on the day when I married Mademoiselle de Nives we should have a generous nuptial gift to bestow on the good nurse. This was very simple, and as it ought to be; but I had never expected that this woman would lay down her conditions before hand and try to get me to sign a bill for twenty-five thousand francs. I hesitated for a long time; on the one hand, I was unwilling to purchase my wife from such a go-between; on the other, I was equally unwilling to bargain for the honor and the pleasure of carrying off my intended bride. I thought I could get out of the difficulty by promising to pay a round sum in Paris when I arrived there with Mademoiselle de Nives. But that would not do; Charliette would not give her aid in the elopement unless she had the written promise in her pocket. I took my pen and began to write out a conditional one. Charliette however demanded a promise without any conditions. She maintained—and she was right to a certain point—that an engagement drawn up in this way compromised her, her husband, and myself, 'I ought,' she said, 'to rely upon her sense of honor to tear up the note if the marriage did not take place;' but I could not bring myself to risk losing twenty-five thousand francs without any compensation, and we separated at midnight without coming to any conclusion, Charliette promising that the elopement should take place the next night if I yielded to her demands.

"I was so agitated and perplexed that I could not think of going to bed. My window looked out upon a bed of cabbages surrounded with a slight fence, on the

one side of which was the garden belonging to the little house rented by my hosts, and on the other was the end of the convent kitchen-garden. It was so low that I could almost step over it. I had looked about enough to know the locality by heart. On the side towards the street, our little yard had a door always locked, and a very high wall covered at the top with fragments of broken bottles; but this door belonged to Charliette's tenement, so her husband did not keep the key with the same care as that of the loft. It often remained in the lock on the inside. There was, perhaps, therefore, a means of escape in this direction as well as by the loft and the door of the house; but Mademoiselle de Nives would have to be informed of it, and be able to make her way into the convent kitchen-garden. I was altogether ignorant as to whether the thing were possible.

"At all hazards, I determined to investigate the door of the loft. Perhaps I could discover some means of opening it? I tried to go out, but I found that Clarliette had locked the door of my room, and that I could not break the lock without making a great noise. I had with me my large country-knife supplied with instruments for all purposes, and I walked from the door to the window without any hope of finding a means of escape, when I fancied I saw a grayish figure glide along the fence, move away, and return with every appearance of uneasiness. It could only be Mademoiselle de Nives. I did not hesitate. I made signs with my lighted cigar that appeared to be perceived and understood, for the mysterious figure did not go away. Then with dexterity and promptness I took the sheets off the bed and tied them end to end. I fastened them as well as I could to my window, which was about twenty feet from the ground, and slid down. When this extemporized rope came to an end, I let go

entirely, and fell among the cabbages without receiving the least injury. I ran to Mademoiselle de Nives, for it was indeed she! With one kick I broke down the fence, took her by the hand without saying a word, and led her without making any noise to the door opening upon the street. The key was not in the lock, and my knife was not of an edge to struggle with this ancient and monumental work. Mademoiselle de Nives, astonished at this plan of escape, entirely different from what she had anticipated, asked me in a whisper where Charliette was.

"'I am going for her,' I said; 'remain in the shade, and do not stir!'

"I went into the locksmith's workshop to find some kind of a tool; but, as I groped about in the darkness, a sudden inspiration recalled to my mind an insignificant circumstance of my first installation in Charliette's home. At that time I asked her for the key of the yard door, so that when I went out of an evening I could return late without disturbing any one. She said, as she gave it to me: "When you come back, you must hang it on a large nail above my husband's work-bench, lest he should suspect anything unusual. He is very religious and would be scandalized.' I searched immediately for the nail where, two years before, I had replaced the key. It was there still and a key was on it; I seized it, praying to Heaven that it might be the same.

"Fortune was on my side—it was the same! It turned noiselessly in the lock: and, seeing myself master of the field of battle in spite of my gaolers, I could not help saying, with a smiling countenance: 'All is right! My host, the locksmith, keeps everything in his department in good order.'

"'Can you laugh at such a moment?' said Made-

moiselle de Nives, full of amusement. 'You have a remarkable degree of coolness!'

"'No but, I am gay—beside myself with joy,' I replied, shutting the door carefully; 'I know however what I am about.'

"'You do not know! you have forgotten Charliette, who is to accompany us.'

"She is waiting for us at the station,' I said. Let us run there!'

"I hurry her along through the dark and deserted streets, and we soon reach the railway-station. A train has just arrived, and stops only five minutes. Marie lowers her veil, I buy the tickets, and hurry with her into an empty carriage, 'What does this mean?' she cries, as she finds the train starting. 'I am here alone with you!'

"'Yes, you are alone with me for the journey. Charliette's courage failed her at the last moment, but I had enough for two. Can you trust me? Do you look upon me as a man of honor?"

"'You are a hero, Jacques! I believe in you, and will do as you wish. If Charliette is a coward, I am not; but I have no money, no luggage—'

"'I have in my pocket all you will need. With money one finds everything in Paris. You said you wished me to obey your commands unconditionally, and I promise obedience. Your esteem is the only recompense I ask; but I want it without reserve; your confidence will be the proof that I have obtained it.'

"'You have it entirely, Jacques. I give it to you in the presence of God, who sees and hears us!'

"I found myself put upon my honor, but mademoiselle de Nives helped me to control myself by her absolute ignorance of my agitation. She is a singular girl, as bold

and courageous as a lion, innocent as a little child. She has not a particle of coquetry, and yet there is an irresistible seduction in her frankness and simplicity. She has read, in her father's old chateau, romances of the age of chivalry; I really believe she has never read anything else, and has always thought that every gentleman was easily and naturally a perfect cavalier of the olden times. She thinks that goodness is as easy to others as it is to herself. I learned to know her even to the bottom of her heart in the two hours' conversation we had together, and the more passionately I loved her, the more impossible it became for me to tell her so. I could do nothing but make protestation of my devotion and submission; I saw plainly that not a word must I utter concerning love and marriage.

"As soon as the train had gone far enough to make it impossible for her to leave me, I determined to tell her the truth, and described my interview with Charliette. 'When I saw,' added I, 'that this woman tried to take advantage of me, I lost all confidence in her. I feared also that, not being able to extort money from you, she would sell your secret to the Countess de Nives. I refused her aid, and relied only on myself to deliver you. It is true that chance served me admirably, for I do not yet know why you happened to be behind that fence.

"I will tell you,' she replied. 'Every arrangement was made for my escape this very night. I was already supplied with the workwoman's dress I am now wearing. I promised to be at the door of the loft at midnight, as my cell is close by this was easily accomplished. At midnight I was there according to promise; but I scratched in vain upon the door—I even knocked cautiously; it was not opened, and there was no response. I remained for a quarter of an hour almost beside myself with uneasi-

ness and impatience. I then thought that Charliette's husband had found out our secret, and had shut her up. Even in that case you ought to be there, and would have spoken to me through the keyhole; if necessary, you would have broken down the door. Some serious accident must have happened to you. I cannot tell you what tragic and frightful things I imagined. I could no longer endure this anguish, and resolved to enter Charliette's house through the garden to find out what was going on among you. I climbed on to the top of the wall separating our flower-garden from the kitchen-garden, for I am light and adroit, I then jumped down upon a heap of straw I saw on the other side. While running to the fence, I saw the light of your cigar shining in the darkness, and watched the luminous whiffs you drew forth, until I comprehended that you recognized me. What terror I felt in seeing you descend from the window so courageously! After all, you are here, and my nurse abandons me! What you tell me of her avarice grieves me without astonishing me very much. She has never asked me for money; she knew I had none; but she knew also that some day I should come into possession of my fortune, and gave me often to understand that she had a right to my gratitude. I am not disposed to forget her, and I will not bargain with her; but from this day I no longer accept her services, and will send her away if she manages to rejoin us.

"'She must not do so,' I said. 'Trust me to render pursuit unavailing. However, if by a miracle she finds us, keep on the right side of her, and pretend to be ignorant of all I have told you; otherwise she will hasten to denounce you.'

"Having arrived at Paris without molestation, we took refuge in the lodgings of Jules Deperches, the best

friend I have there, and who I had asked long beforehand to be ready at any time to render me a great service. Like a gentleman, he at once gave up his apartment to us without asking a single question, or even seeing the veiled face of my companion. I hastened to hire a room for myself at the nearest hotel, and left Marie to rest herself. The next morning I lost no time in procuring linen, dresses, bonnets, boots, and a cloak, for my poor Marie, destitute of everything. I did not spare money; I bought her a charming costume, as well as a more simple one which she asked for, not wishing to attract attention.

"I cannot describe the happiness the child felt in receiving these gifts and in beholding her beautiful dress and rich linen—she, who for years had worn only the thick woollen garb of the young nun. I was delighted with the appreciation she manifested, and ran to buy her gloves, a parasol, a watch, ribbons, and everything else I could think of! She discovered that I had good taste, and promised to consult me always in regard to her dress. She was absolutely on confidential terms with me, and called me her brother, her dear Jacques, her friend. The sweetest words issued from her lips; her eyes caressed me; she thought me handsome, amiable, brave, witty, charming; she loved me at last, and I ventured to kneel before her, and entreat the happiness of kissing her hand. How do you think she received my advances? She held out her hand to me, and I was foolish enough to try to kiss as high as the elbow. She drew it back abruptly, angry at first; then her feelings found expression in a nervous burst of laughter.

"'What kind of manners are these, my dear Jacques?' she said. 'I do not understand them; but I feel that I do not like them. You forget who I am; but, indeed, you do not know, and I see that it is time to tell you.

I am not what you suppose—a girl eager for freedom, and in a hurry to find a husband. I have not yet made up my mind to marry. I am religious—a devotee, if you will—and a life of celibacy has always been my ideal. I have not been unhappy in the convent from the fault of those around me. It is the necessity for conformity to rule that was my enemy and my executioner. I require movement, air, and noise. My father was a horseman and a huntsman; I take after him, resemble him, have his tastes; confinement kills me, and I have a horror of convents because they are the prisons where I have been forced to pass my life; but I love the nuns when they are good, because they are pure women, and their renunciation of the delights of domestic life seems to me an act of courage and heroism. Therefore I deceived no one when I said, as I often did, that I was not opposed to convent-life. My stepmother relied upon this declaration; and, when I refused to make an unconditional engagement before I became of age, she greatly feared lest I might dispose of my fortune to some community. She was even angry with the Abbess of Clermont, who did not wish me to be pressed too strongly. I had an idea in my head that I would not confide to any one, and I still dream of being able to realize it. I intend to recover my property, and I shall then found perhaps an order of Sisters of Mercy, which I shall establish at Nives, to take care of the poor and the sick, and to bring up children. We shall not be cloistered, and we shall travel about the country continually to help the needy and to do good works. It seems to me that I shall be perfectly happy in carrying out this plan. I shall be equally devoted to a holy life, with charity for my only law of action, without being shut up alive in a tomb, and running the risk of letting my heart die with my reason.

You see, then, very plainly, my good Jacques, that you must not kneel before me, nor be always kissing my hand, as if I were a great lady, for I never shall be one."

"Such is Mademoiselle de Nives's plan, and, if you see her, you will learn that she will not yet decide to modify it. You will say that it ought to have been in my power to make her change her resolution. You may well believe that I did my utmost; but how can you persuade a woman, when you have nothing but words to use in a contest? Pardon me, uncle, speech is a fine thing when one possesses your power of using it. It was usless for me to study law; I shall always talk like a villager, and I know nothing of the subtile arguments that hold, even against their will, such sway over those who listen. A woman is a being naturally captious, who cannot be taken hold of by the ears, and who submits only to a certain magnetism when she does not keep herself too far away from the fluid; but what can be done with a woman who will not allow the least familiarity, and who possesses such a spirit of strife and revolt that no one but a brute or a savage can tame her?

"I was obliged to submit absolutely, and become an Amadis des Gaules, to be allowed to remain at her side. The worst of the affair is, that in this game I have grown as amorous as a schoolboy, and the fear of displeasing her has made me a drudge and a slave.

"Besides all that I have mentioned, she is full of contrasts and inconsistencies. She had been brought up in mysticism, while the cultivation of her reasoning power has been systematically neglected. All her thoughts being turned heavenwards, she plays with the realities of the world as with charming nothings which she will leave behind, so soon as religious exaltation carries her elsewhere. She is passionately fond of dancing, dress, pleasure. When

we were in Paris, on the very first evening, she wanted to go to the theatre, and afterwards return there every night to see the scenery, ballets, operas and fairy-scenes, but she did not care a particle for literary performances or tragedies, and could not endure the slightest indelicacy. She did not understand these things at all, and yawned while looking on; but the enchanted palaces, the grottoes of the sirens and the Bengal lights were happiness to her—almost delirium. I hired a very dark box, and closeted myself with a pearl of beauty, admirably set; and the box-keepers, who alone saw her charming face free from her thick veils, smiled at my happiness, while I played the part of a great pendant condemned to explain the strings and machinery to a child seven years old!—You are laughing at me, uncle?"

"Yes, I am laughing; I find it a well-merited punishment for such a gay Don Juan, who takes it upon himself to elope with a novice without having the least suspicion of the kind of bird he has taken charge of. But to come to the point, did she seek legal advice in Paris?"

"Indeed she did! Among her oddities, she possesses a surprising knowledge of business, and a facile memory of the law-terms connected with it. She consulted M. Allou, and now knows her situation on her finger's end."

"Very well; but did she tell him that, in allowing herself to be carried off by a great paladin, well known in his neighborhood for his numerous conquests, she gave arms against herself to a stepmother who is still her guardian, and who can reclaim her and reinstate her by force in the convent, if it were only for a week, with all the flourish of trumpets of a great scandal?"

"I do not believe she told all this to her lawyer, but I think she told it to her confessor, for she had a religious consultation with a very able and influential abbe, who,

learning that she had more than a million to devote to the service of her faith, found her above all suspicion, and sheltered from all danger. Only he advised her to separate from me as quickly as possible, and to keep concealed until the day she came of age. He did not, however forbid her from regarding me as a brother and a friend; for Marie, who was unacquainted with my past follies, probably represented me to him as a little lamb without spot, capable of giving her assistance in her holy enterprise. In short, all these proceedings being ended, we once more took the train, and, after a week passed *tete-a-tete* in Paris with your humble servant, she arrived at Vignolette on a beautiful summer night, as pure and tranquil as when she came out of the convent."

"Was it you, then, who accompanied her to your sister's house? I thought she arrived there with her nurse."

"Ah! I forgot to tell you. As we were leaving the railway-carriage to dine at Montlucon, whom should we meet but Charlette? She was on her way to Paris in search of us, and little thought of finding us so soon. Marie, guided by my advice, received her kindly. "You were afraid at the last minute?' she said. 'This is all for the best, since you are not involved in the affair, and will be more useful than if you had followed me to Paris. You can take me to Mademoiselle Ormonde's, and remain at Riom to gain information of my stepmother's proceedings."

"Charliette went with her to Vignolette, and then rejoined her husband at Riom, where I have since met her. We two had a lively explanation. She naturally is in a rage with me, since I succeeded in frustrating her plans. At first she thought I had acquired the rights of marriage over Mademoiselle de Nives, When she found out her

mistake, she came to the fore again and renewed the offer of her services on the same terms, pretending that, according to her anticipations, her husband, driven from the convent, had lost his situation and was encountering many obstacles in recovering the one he had formerly occupied at Riom. She threatened, in covert words, to reveal everything to the stepmother. I was obliged to come down with the money, especially as I believe the honest and pious husband is in perfect accord with his wife to take advantage of the situation without appearing to know anything about it. However, I made a better bargain than the bill for twenty-five thousand francs, and resolved, as soon as Marie came of age, to send the nurse about her business.

"Unfortunately, and against my sister's wishes, who dislikes and distrusts her, she has seen Marie very often during her stay at Vignolette. She has kept her secret faithfully, but has used every effort she could to prejudice her against me; and I am certain that she has suggested another husband to her, but I cannot tell whom she has chosen to supplant me, or upon whom she rests her new hope of a fortune. I know only one thing; this evening Henri accosted Mademoiselle de Nives like a person with whom she had made an appointment; they talked in a low tone, but with much excitement, during the pauses in the dance, and afterwards disappeared together. I thought I had planned so wisely in putting out the light; it was indeed a brilliant idea! they took advantage of it to run away!"

"Where do you think they have gone? If it is to Vignolette, I am certain that Henri will not allow himself to cross the threshold."

"I do not think they have gone there, for that very reason. Perhaps Marie has taken it into her head to

return to the convent and remain there during the last days of her minority."

"In that case, Henri would have given her better advice than you did,"

"And his position in regard to her would be better than mine," replied Jacques, with a sigh.

"Hush!" I said. "Some one is calling us—it is Henri's voice."

He soon joined us. "I was uneasy about you, father," he said. "All our relatives have gone, regretting not being able to wish you good-by. My mother is still waiting for you at Rosier's."

"And where have you been," I replied, "during the two hours that I have been looking for you?"

"You were looking for me? Not in this mysterious wood, where you have been with Jacques for an hour at least?"

"But where do you come from?"

"From home. I returned a little fatigued and bored with this ball in the midst of the dust; but not seeing you return, I thought you might perhaps want me, and came back to the *fete*, which is now over, and my mother is getting very impatient."

We left Jacques slightly reassured, and went to deliver Madame Chantebel, who, accusing me of being delayed by a client, stormed for the hundred-thousandth time against pleaders and barristers in general.

Did Henri wish to confide anything, or make a confession of any kind to me? In order to give him the opportunity, as soon as we returned, I went with him to his room to smoke a cigar before going to bed. "You know," I said, while talking of the events of the day, "that Miette came to bring her bouquet to me?"

"I know it," he replied, "and regret not having seen her."

"Who told you that she came?"

"A servant; I cannot remember who it was."

"She was at the *fete* this evening. You did not come near us, though we saw you from Rosier's garden dancing with a very pretty village-girl."

"Yes, I danced one *bourree*, thinking it would amuse me as it used to."

"And that wearied you?"

"If I had known that Miette was there—"

"You would have invited her, I suppose?"

"Certainly. Did she see me when I was dancing?"

"I don't know; I was looking at your partner. Do you know that she is a remarkable person?"

"Yes, for a peasant; very white, with small hands."

"Who is she? and where does she come from?"

"I did not think to ask her."

In making this reply Henri threw his cigar into the fireplace, as much as to say, "Is it not about time to go to bed?"

I left him without urging him any more. Either he was sincere, and ought not to suspect what was passing in my mind, or he was determined to be silent, and I had no right to question him. My son was not as easily penetrated as his cousin Jacques. He possessed a stronger will and greater breadth of character.

The next day and the day after, in order to see him even for a little while, I was obliged to climb up to the tower, where he had installed himself with two workmen and a servant. He was so delighted with this romantic spot, that he was fitting up a room for a refuge, should stormy weather surprise him in his walks.

"You are in a great hurry," I said, finding him en-

grossed with painting and hanging. "I agreed to have one or two rooms furnished to suit your own taste, and you have carried out my economical ideas too rigidly."

"Not at all, father," he replied; "I know very well that I am a spoiled child, and that you would deny me nothing for my pleasure; but, on examining the building, I discovered that it would be in better taste to leave the rooms in their old-fashioned rusticity than to make additions and improvements. Here are the two rooms that old Coras occupied. I have put this great sofa of Cordova leather in the bedroom in place of the broken-down bedstead. The hangings were only soiled by the dust that had settled upon them, and I have brought a carpet to conceal the broken tiles. The windows close all right. This ceiling, with its joists blackened by smoke, has an excellent tone. In short, a great deal of sweeping was required, and a few repairs in the painting that will be dry this evening. To-morrow I can bring some books and a good, solid, old table, and I shall be installed like a prince."

The next day he easily finished his furnishing with some of our old lumber, and passed the afternoon in arranging his books in the cupboards.

I was intending to go to Vignolette to find out if my niece was in a more tranquil frame of mind, when I received the following note from her:

"Do not be troubled about me, my dear good uncle; we have had no disputes at home. I found my companion there on my arrival: she had returned with her nurse, and did not say a word of her thoughtless freak. I thought it right to ignore it utterly, and not to oppose her evening walks with this woman, who now comes every day, and appears to have acquired much more influence over her than I have. I do not wish to be mixed

up too much with their little secrets; my duty is limited to hospitality. Fortunately, time moves apace, and will soon release me from a responsibility always painful when unaccompanied by authority."

This missive did not make me feel any more at ease, and I began to watch Henri stealthily with scrupulous attention. I noticed on this same evening, that, like the evening before, he rose from table as soon as coffee was served, and went away with Ninie on his shoulders to "play horse" in the garden. There were shouts and bursts of laughter, then the noise grew faint in the distance, and at the end of half an hour the child returned with her nurse. Henri did not reappear until an hour later, saying that he had smoked his cigar outside, that his mother might not be annoyed.

On the third day of these proceedings I resolved to disburden my mind. Circumstances favored my intention; Madame Chantebel had two old friends for guests, who plunged into cards with her as soon as dinner was over. She did not concern herself about the little girl, who seemed to adore Henri, and on whom Henri appeared to dote.

The days were rapidly growing shorter. I waited for the twilight, increased by the thick foliage of the trees, to steal into the garden, and thence into a neighboring meadow, where a double foot-path ascended in one direction to the tower and in the other descended to the village. I heard the child's voice coming from a clump of willows shading a spring on the border of the meadow, just at the foot of the rock that bears the tower. I turned my steps in that direction, keeping close to the bushes, and soon saw Henri come out from amongst the willows, bearing Ninie in his arms. He took the shortest course—that is, instead of going, as I did, along the

hedge, he followed the path leading to the garden. Evidently he was carrying the child to the house to give her back to her nurse, and he was going to return. I was on the watch, and saw two women come from under the willow-trees, take the path to the tower, and disappear in the foliage of the vines covering the hillock. I still waited, perfectly quiet, in the thicket, but I did not see my son return as I anticipated. Upon reflection I said to myself, if he returned to the tower he would take a still more direct road—he would cross the nursery and climb the rock perpendicularly.

I heard the village clock strike. It was only eight o'clock. Henri would not re-appear in the drawing-room till nine. He had, then, already returned to the tower. I could go there through the vines, since the two women had got the start of me. I did not hesitate, and, although the ascent in this direction was steep, I arrived at the foot of the tower in less than ten minutes. It was entirely dark; there was no moon, and the sky was overcast, but everything was silent and calm. I could easily conceal myself even when approaching near the entrance, and I could only learn something by listening. This did not take long, nor was it difficult. Henri and one of the women were standing three steps from me; the other woman kept watch at a little distance.

"Now, then," said Henri, "have you decided?"

"Yes, positively decided."

"Very well; do not return to-morrow—it is useless."

"Oh, yes, again to-morrow! Do let me come."

"I warn you that it is very imprudent."

"I know nothing about prudence; are you not aware of that?"

"I can see very well that you do not!"

"I scorn all slander, and have a higher aim than to

UNIVERSITY CALIFORNIA

watch that chimera which in human language is called reputation. I am responsible only to God; and, if I do right in his eyes, I may laugh at everything else."

"But you wish to be successful, so must not create useless obstacles. If your secret is discovered, the object of your solicitude will be sent away."

"How will my secret be discovered unless you betray me?"

"I have sworn that I will not betray you; but the child will talk."

"What can she say? She saw a peasant girl who embraced and caressed her—that is all. My friend, let me come to-morrow!"

"To-morrow it will rain in torrents; the sky is covered with clouds."

"If it rains, do not bring Ninie; I will come just the same to hear how she is."

"Very well; on one condition, that it shall be the last time, and you will allow me immediately after to confide everything to my father."

"Let it be so! Adieu until to-morrow. O my dear friend, may God be with you and bless you, as I bless you! Adieu!"

She called her companion with a light whistle, and both took their way through the pines. Henri followed them to the verge of the wood, as well as I could judge from the light sound of their footsteps on the paths and the dead branches.

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH I found it necessary to watch my son's movements, I did not wish him to have the least suspicion of it. I went home, and when he appeared, I did not give him a hint of my discovery. Jacques arrived about ten o'clock, saying that he had just returned from a shooting-party, and could not pass the door without coming in to see us.

"Didn't you kill anything?" asked Madame Chantebel; "for, contrary to your usual habit, your hands are empty."

"Excuse me, aunt," he replied, "I have left one poor haré in the kitchen."

"Will you play a game of piquet with your uncle?"

"I am at his disposal."

I saw plainly that Jacques had something to tell me. "Perhaps we had better take a walk in the garden instead," I answered, taking his arm.—"You have a great fire for the season, ladies, and it is stifling here."

"Well, what is the news?" I said to my great boy of a nephew, when we were alone. "You appear to be entirely cast down."

"Cast down to the depths, cast down to death, my good uncle! It is just as I told you—Henri treads upon my heels. There is an appointment every evening at the tower of Percemont."

"Who told you so?"

"I saw, I watched, I followed. This very evening—"

"Did you listen?"

"Yes, but I couldn't hear anything."

"Then you are an unskilful fellow. He who does not hear the bell knows nothing of its sound."

"Do you expect me to believe that Mademoiselle de Nives keeps appointments with Henri to tell over her beads?"

"Did she pass her time in this way when she was with you?"

"She made fun of me, and perhaps she is now doing the same with my cousin; but in making fun of everybody she risks her honor, and that is serious."

"Did you not tell me that it was impossible to subdue her will, or take advantage of her innocence?"

"I said that on my own account, for I am little skilled in the use of words or in the eloquence that produces conviction. Henri is a barrister; he knows how to say—"

"Then he is more dangerous than you, whom I believed irresistible."

"Ah! uncle, you are laughing at me, which means that you abandon my cause."

"Have I promised to help you in your love-affairs?"

"You listened to my story with an attention that I took for interest."

"I have not made up my mind upon the subject, and am very little interested in your projects for securing a fortune. If you only think of marrying a million, that is an affair between you and Charliette, and I will not be mixed up with it."

"Uncle, you humiliate me. In truth, you treat me with great injustice. The million is of no value, if the woman is dishonored."

"She is not—of this I am sure; but she will surely be some day, if she shows the same want of judgment as she has already done."

"You know, then—"

"I know what you are going to tell me, and make this reply: If she has relations with Henri they are and may remain pure; but if this young lady takes every day a new confidant, she will end by finding some one who will compromise her, and the scandal will be reflected upon your sister. Now, as it is she, she alone, who interests me in the whole affair, I shall to-morrow take proceedings to put an end to a vexatious and ridiculous situation."

"Take proceedings? Ah! uncle, what are you going to do? Inform Madame de Nives? Ruin this poor child?

"Why, then, do you accuse her?"

"I do not accuse her! I pity myself, that is all; but I would sooner cut off both hands than do her an injury. If you knew how grand and good she is with all her faults, you would excuse her as being simply a little absurd and romantic."

"However, if she leaves you in the lurch, and if, after having deluded you with her mystic projects, she takes a husband, and this husband is not you?"

"Well! uncle?"

"Will you not seek to be revenged?"

"No, never! On that day I shall get drunk like a Pole, or fire off my fowling-piece with my foot, I cannot tell which! but to wrong her, to speak evil, to betray—no! I could not! She is not like any other woman; she is an angel, a strange angel, an insane angel; there are some perhaps who are so; but she is also the personification of a kind heart, good intentions, disinterestedness, and charity. What would be wrong in another person is not so for her. No! she must not be harmed. No, uncle, forget everything I have told you."

"Come," I replied, taking Jacques's hand in mine; "I see that you are still my sister's child, the good kind Jacquet who never injures any one but himself, and redeems everything with his heart. I think now that you really love Mademoiselle de Nives. Therefore you ought to marry her; I promise to do everything in my power to make you happy if she is as good as you say. I will see her, question her, and study the matter thoroughly."

"Thanks my dear uncle! but your son—"

"My son has nothing to say concerning it."

"Indeed—"

"Do not talk to me of him before I understand the state of affairs. Go to bed, and give up being a spy. I will watch, but I wish to watch alone. You understand me! Keep quiet, or I will abandon your cause."

Big Jacquet embraced me, and I felt his warm tears on my cheeks. He went to take leave of my wife, grasped Henri's hand convulsively, and, mounting his pony, set off at full gallop for Champgousse.

I waited patiently through the whole of the next day. As Henri had foreseen, it rained incessantly, and it was impossible for Mademoiselle Ninie to go out. After dinner she climbed upon his shoulders and whispered to him.

"You two have secrets between yourselves?" said my wife, struck with the sly and mysterious appearance of the child.

"Oh, yes, great secrets, which I will not tell," replied Ninie, putting her little hands over Henri's mouth—"Don't tell them anything, my dear Henri, and please carry me to the fountain."

"No, it is impossible," said Henri. "There is no fountain this evening. The rain would swamp our paper-boats; we must wait for another day."

He got up and went out. Ninie began to cry. My wife wished to console her. I did not give her an opportunity, for, taking the child in my arms, I carried her to my study to show her some pictures. When she had forgotten her disappointment, I endeavored, without questioning her, to find out if she were capable of keeping a secret; I promised to make beautiful paper-boats for her the next day, and to make them sail on the pond in the garden.

"No, no," she said; "your pond is not pretty enough. I mean the fountain in the meadow! there the water is beautiful and clear. And there, too, is Suzette, who knows how to amuse me better than you, better than Henri, and all the world."

"Suzette, then, is a little girl of your own age, whom you have met there?"

"Of my age? I don't know; she is much bigger than I am."

"Big as Bébelle?"

"Oh, no, and not so old! Suzette is very pretty, and loves me so much?"

"And why does she love you so much?"

"Oh! I don't know; perhaps it is because I love her in the same way, and kiss her as much as she wants me to. She says that I am pretty and very good."

"And where does Suzette live?"

"She lives—dear me! I suppose she lives at the fountain; she is there every evening."

"But there are no houses there."

"That is true. Then she comes to see me so as to make boats for me."

"This, then, was your great secret with Henri?"

"I was afraid Bébelle wouldn't let me go out."

I saw that the child had not been entrusted with the

secret, and would easily forget the pretended Suzette if she did not see her again before her mother's return. I saw, also, why Henri had been in such a hurry to put the old rooms in order at Percemont, for, regardless of the rain, he went there as he had promised, and did not return until ten o'clock. As soon as his mother had retired to rest, he said to me:

"I deceived you the other day, my dear father. Allow me to relate to you this evening the true story; but, to commence quickly and clearly, read this letter that I received by post on the evening before St. Hyacinthe's day."

"Sir,—Render a great service to a person who has faith in your honor. Be to-morrow evening at the *fete* of Percemont. I will be there, and will whisper in your ear the name of Suzette."

"You see the orthography is a little fanciful. I imagined some frivolous adventure or a demand for assistance. I followed you to the *fete*, and saw Jacques, dancing with a fascinating village-girl, with whom he appeared to be very much enamoured, and who, passing near me, threw adroitly into my ear the word agreed upon—'Suzette.' I invited her to dance with me, to Jacques's great displeasure, and we came rapidly to an explanation during the *bourree*.

"'I am not Suzette,' she said, 'but Marie de Nives. I am living in strict concealment at Vignolette. Emilie, my excellent, my best friend, does not know that I am here, and her brother Jacques is displeased with me for coming. I have not told them my secret, for they would say, I was doing a foolish thing; however, I wish to do it, and I will do it, unless you refuse your assistance and friendship. I demand them, and I have a right to expect them. You did me a great wrong without suspect-

ing it. When I was at the convent of Riom, you wrote me letters that were looked upon as criminal. On account of these unfortunate letters, I was taken from this convent, where I was loved and treated kindly, and shut up at Clermont under more severe regulations. Jacques helped me to escape. I went to Paris to obtain legal advice. I now understand my rights, and shall soon enforce them; but while I condemn my stepmother, there is in my heart one tender and ardent desire! I want to see her daughter, my poor father's daughter, my little sister Leonie. She is at your house; manage in some way to let me see her. The present time is favorable, and another such opportunity may perhaps never occur. Your whole family is here; the child is alone with her nurse in your house. I have skilful spies at my command, who keep me informed of all that goes on. Take me to your house, let me only see my sister. I will just look at her while she is sleeping, and I will not waken her. Grant me the privilege of seeing her, and I shall owe you eternal gratitude.'

"The time and the place were not suitable for discussion. I cannot tell what answer I should have made it it had not been for an awkward incident provoked by Jacques's jealousy. He put out the lantern, and, in the confusion that followed, Mademoiselle de Nives, seizing my arm with extraordinary nervous force, hurried me along into the darkness saying: 'Now God wills it, you see; let us go to your house.'

"I was literally blind. That light, that was bright enough to put one's eyes out, having been suddenly extinguished, I walked without knowing where my steps tended, and my companion seemed to lead me. After a minute or two I discovered that we were going in the

direction of the meadow, and that we were not alone, A man and woman were walking in front of us.

"'It is my nurse and her husband,' said Mademoiselle de Nives; 'they are faithful servants, fear nothing; I have others besides these in my service. I have my sister's nurse, who was discharged, and now watches over my interests.'

"Do you know,' I said, 'that you make me somewhat uneasy by acting in this way?"

"'How so?"

"'Perhaps you have formed a plan for carrying off the child, in order to have the mother in your power. I give you warning that I shall oppose it absolutely. She has been confided to my parents, and, although this confidence is a little strange, we are responsible, and consider the trust sacred.'

"You have a very bad opinion of me,' she replied, 'and must have heard many unkind reports concerning me. I do not deserve them, and am resigned to wait for the future to justify me.'

"Her voice had a penetrating clearness and sweetness. I was ashamed of my suspicions, and tried to make excuses for my rudeness.

"'Do not speak,' she said; 'it will only delay us—run!'

And she hurried across the meadows scarcely touching the soil, light as a bird of night.

"We stopped a moment when we arrived at the garden-gate. 'I have not yet thought of a way,' I said, 'of taking you to the child without danger of your being seen by the servant who has charge of her. I warn you that Mademoiselle Ninie sleeps in my mother's chamber, and that during her absence a nurse, installed in an easy-chair, sleeps perhaps very lightly. I know nothing about

her; she is a young peasant with whom I am not acquainted.'

"'I am acquainted with her,' replied Mademoiselle de Nives; 'she came to Emilie's, a fortnight since, to ask for work. We gave her some, and I know that she is gentle and good. Do not be troubled. I know, also, that she sleeps soundly, for she did not waken during a frightful storm. Come, quick, let us enter!'

"'Allow me—you must enter alone with me. The persons who accompany you will wait here.'

"'Of course.'

"I led her, without noise, to my mother's chamber, guiding her through the dark passages. I entered first, softly. The little nurse did not stir. A candle was burning on a table behind the curtain. Mademoiselle de Nives took it resolutely, in order to look at the sleeping child; then gave it to me, and, kneeling by the bedside, glued her lips to Ninie's little hand, saying, as if she were praying to God:

"'Grant that she may love me—I swear to love her dearly!'

"I touched her gently on the shoulder. She arose and followed me submissively to the garden. There she took both my hands in hers, saying to me: 'Henri Chantebel, you have given me the greatest happiness I ever experienced in my hard and sad life; you are now for me like one of those angels whom I often invoke, and who inspire me with calmness and courage during my meditations. I am a poor girl, without mind and without instruction. Those who had charge of me brought me up in this way; they did it on purpose, for they thought the more ignorant I was, the less power I should have to assert my rights. But the light necessary to guide my steps comes from above; no one can put it out. Have

confidence in me, as I had confidence in you. Confidence is so noble! Without it everything is evil and impossible. Permit me to see my sister again, to hear her voice, to read her looks, and to receive her first kiss. Let me return to-morrow, disguised as to-day. Remember, no one knows my face; your parents have never seen me, and Madame de Nives herself would perhaps not recognize me, for she has not seen me for many years. I will hide somewhere, you will bring Leonie to me, you will be there, and you will not leave her. Must I entreat you on my knees? Behold me—here I am!'

"A little disturbed by her exaltation, but conquered by the charm emanating from so remarkable a person, I consented to a meeting at the tower of Piercemont the next day at dusk, promising to find some means of taking her sister to meet her, and I asked permission to inform you of what was going on.

"'Oh no, not yet!' she cried. 'I shall tell everything to your father myself, for I have much to tell, and he will be obliged to listen to me; it is his duty to Madame de Nives and my sister. I can ruin them, but I do not wish to. However there is one thing about which I have not yet entirely made up my mind; I must see the child again, and, if your parents oppose it, I shall not know what I ought to do. Promise to keep my secret for a few days.'

"'Well, I promise. But Jacques!—What shall I say to him if he asks me any questions?'

"'He will not ask you any questions.'

"'Is he not your betrothed?'

"'No, he is nothing to me but a generous and excellent friend.'

"'But he loves you. That is very clear.'

"'He loves me, yes, and I return it with all my

heart, but there is not a word of love-making between us. You swear to keep my secret?'

"'Yes, I swear.'

"'Oh how I love you!'

"'Not so much as Jacques?'

"'Still more!'

"After this she went away with her companion, leaving me astonished and rather staggered with the adventure.

"The next day—that is the day before yesterday—I decided upon the fountain in the meadow as the most favorable place for the meeting. I found means of informing Charliette, that devoted nurse, who came in the daytime to explore the wood of Percemont so as to find her way about without following the beaten paths. She is a skilful and sagacious woman. I showed her the fountain from the hill above it, and the path through the vines that leads to it. I took down the fences, and the same evening, while playing with Ninie, carried her, without saying anything, to her sister, who was waiting for her under the willows. The acquaintance was quickly made, thanks to the paper-boats; but I must say that Mademoiselle de Nives's passion for this child was like an irresistible magnet. In a short time Leonie was hanging upon her neck, and devouring her with caresses. She was unwilling to leave her, and I could only induce her to go back to her nurse by promising to bring her the next day to the fountain and Suzette.

"Yesterday again I kept my word. Suzette had crammed her pockets with blue and rose-colored paper. She made, with a nun's dexterity, charming little boats that floated delightfully; but Ninie was not so much amused as on the evening before. She had made up her mind never to leave Suzette, and insisted upon taking

her home with her for a nurse. I had great trouble in separating them. Finally, this evening for the last time I saw Mademoiselle de Nives in the tower, where we had agreed to meet. I considered this interview useless to her plans, and agreed to it with regret, since the bad weather prevented me from taking Léonie to her sister. I went to the meeting a little out of temper. Mademoiselle de Nives is an irritating person. She throws herself on your neck, morally speaking. She has inflections of tenderness and exaggerated expressions of gratitude which must trouble poor Jacques profoundly, and have made me impatient more than once; but it is impossible to give expression to the disapprobation she provokes. She is not affected, she does not study an attitude, she is naturally beyond the region of probability, and yet she is in the right when her point of view is accepted. We talked for two hours, *tete-a-tete*, in the town where I had kindled a great fire of pine-cones to dry her wet garments, and was obliged to see that she was warm in spite of herself. Fearless, and like one insensible to all external influences, she had walked smiling under a beating rain, and smiled anew in seeing me troubled on account of her health. She manifested no more embarrassment nor fear in finding herself alone with me, coming to an interview dangerous to her reputation, than if I had been her brother. The nurse stayed below in the kitchen, warming herself also, and troubling herself no more at leaving us together than if eccentricities of this kind were nothing new to her. All this would have turned the head of an ambitious fool, for Mademoiselle de Nives is an eligible person, and can be easily compromised; but I hope that you have a sufficiently good opinion of me to be very certain that I have not made love to her, and shall not do so. This is my romance, dear father. Tell me what you think

of it, and if you blame me for having allowed the adverse party—for my mother pretends that you are the defender and legal adviser of the countess—to embrace her little sister Ninie without your knowledge?"

CHAPTER XII.

"REDUCED to these proportions, the affair is not serious," I replied; "but you have not told me the most important part— your conversation of this evening, your only conversation; for, until this time, you could exchange nothing but a few interrupted words, as you were not alone together."

"Yes, indeed! the two preceding days I escorted her half-way to Vignolette through the woods; the nurse —I ought to say the duenna—walked at a respectful distance."

"Then you know what those great projects are upon which Mademoiselle de Nives, your client, intends to converse with me?"

"An attempt at reconciliation between herself and her stepmother; Mademoiselle de Nives wishes to be at liberty to see her sister occasionally."

"I believe that the interviews will be dearly purchased; and then how to make an engagement binding? Marie de Nives has no power over Léonie de Nives, and the law will give her no support."

"She relies upon you to find the means."

"Do you see any?"

"I see a thousand if your client looks only for money,

as mine pretends she does. We have only to interest her in the duration of the two sisters' friendship."

"Everything appears simple when suppositions are taken for accomplished facts. Suppose that my client—since client she is, according to you—has an unconquerable aversion to her stepdaughter, that she fights for her fortune, but that it is only for her daughter's sake, and that she would prefer her to remain poor rather than to be exposed to the influence of a person of whom she has so bad an opinion?"

"You will plead with her for poor Marie."

"Poor Marie is greatly to be pitied for the past; but seeing how she is behaving now she is free, I own that I feel no special interest in her."

"You are not acquainted with her yet."

"I accept her as you paint her, and as Jacques has described her. Your two versions, differently drawn up, agree in essential points. I think she is an excellent person, with very pure intentions. Is that sufficient to make her a judicious woman, a serious being, capable of directing a child like Léonie, and of inspiring some confidence in her mother? I do not believe her capable of inspiring respect."

"Indeed! I assure you she is quite capable of that."

"You mean, you have been very much interested in her, and have known how to conceal it from her through respect for yourself!"

"Do not speak of me; I am out of the question. Speak of Jacques."

"Jacques has been still more interested and probably more timid than you. Jacques is a youth whose wild deeds and depths of sentiment need not be much dreaded by any person ever so badly brought up. Shall I tell you what I think? I do not believe your client in danger, but

I think her dangerous. I see her in a very agreeable and even diverting situation, since she finds means to reconcile in her conscience, obscurely enlightened from above —or from below—the frivolous pleasures of life with celestial ecstasy. She cherishes in the convent the idea of being a wise virgin, but has the instincts of a foolish virgin, and, from the moment that she throws off the restraint of austerity which, armed at all points, forms the strength of Catholicism, I do not see where she will stop. She has nothing to put in the place of this terrible yoke necessary to minds without culture, and consequently without reflection. She has no philosophy to create a law for herself, and no appreciation of social life and the obligations it imposes. She forms a fantastic idea of duty, seeks her own in the combinations of romance, and has not the least conception of the most simple moral obligations. It pleases her to leave the convent before the time —close at hand—fixed by the law for her deliverance; she did not know how to find a proper protection for this rash act, and accepts that of a woman who speculates upon the liberality of the suitors she recruits. She finds it natural to accept Jacques Ormonde for a liberator, passes eight days alone with him, and, as he does not inspire her with love—so I understand—cares very little for the passion aroused in his breast, the hopes he cherishes, the bursts of anger and suspense she imposes upon him."

"Father, she is entirely ignorant of these things, and has no idea of the passion of love."

"So much the worse for her! A woman should have an intuitive perception of what she does not know by experience; otherwise she is not a woman, she is a hybrid, mysterious and suspicious, whom every one should be afraid of. Who can tell where the awakening of the

senses will lead such a person? I believe that the senses already play the principal part in that angelic chastity yours drives the young lady from Jacques's arms into mine; she has sought and found only protectors."

"Say, rather, from the support of Jacques's arm to that."

"One improvised protector is a great deal. Two are much too many for two months of liberty! Why has not this heroine of romance succeeded in overcoming my repugnance to become acquainted with her and listen to her story? Since she knows how to disguise herself so well, she might have found entrance here as a servant—we were looking for one to take care of the child!"

"She thought of it, but was afraid of my mother's penetration, who she knows is prejudiced against her."

"She was afraid of your mother, and she was afraid of me! Invited by Miette and Jacques to trust her affairs to me, she did not dare to follow her advice—she does not yet dare. She prefers to apply to you in order to see her sister, as she applied to Jacquet to escape from her cage. Shall I tell you why?"

"Tell me, father."

"Because the support of young men is always assured to a pretty girl, while the old exercise their judgment in the question. Beauty produces a rapid proselytism. A young man is combustible material, and does not resist like an old, incombustible man of the law. With a tender glance and a suppliant word, in the twinkling of an eye, she finds brilliant cavaliers ready for every foolish enterprise. She trusts to them her most intimate secrets, and they are delighted to be received as confidants. Is not this confidence the supreme favor? She lures them on this way and very soon controls them. She accepts their love provided they do not express their feelings too

plainly, exposes them without scruple to scandalous tongues, makes use of their money—"

"Father—!"

"Not you! but Jacques is already in for a large sum, I can tell you. She is rich, will pay her obligations, and preserve a sincere gratitude for the two friends—and end by marrying a third; the others will get out of the affair as they like. I tell you, my son, you have just passed two hours *tete-a-tete*, intoxicating and painful at the same time, with an angel; but, united with this angel, there is an ungrateful devotee and, perhaps, a consummate coquette. Take care of yourself—that is all I say to you!"

My son, while listening to me, moved about uneasily, his eyes fixed upon the embers, and his face pale in spite of the red light reflected upon it by the fire. It seemed to me I had touched the right chord.

"Then," he said, rising and fixing upon me his great, black eyes full of expression, "you blame me for having helped to carry out the plans of this young lady?"

"Not at all. At your age I should have done the same thing; only, I tell you to be on your guard."

"Lest I fall in love? You take me for a school-boy."

"It is not very long since you were one, and so much the better for you."

He reflected a few moments, and replied: "That is true; it is not very long since I was in love with Miette, when the thought of her made my heart beat, and kept me from sleeping. Miette is much more beautiful now; above all, she has an expression, and I do not see that freshness and health injure the ideal in a type of woman. The Greek statues have rounded outlines in poetry. Mademoiselle de Nives is pretty like a little boy. Her

paleness is a matter of fancy. And then it is not beauty that takes possession of the heart—it is character. I have studied this character—a character entirely new to me—more judicially than you think; and, in all that you have just said, I think there is much truth, in regard to ingratitude, especially. I could not help telling her that she made Jacques suffer cruelly; she believed herself justified in saying that she had made no promises to him."

"She does something worse that you did not think of. She tries to injure Emilie's character."

"I thought of it, and told her so. What do you think she said in reply? 'Emilie's character cannot be injured. She possesses a purity beyond all stain. If any one said that I behaved improperly while under her roof, the whole country would reply with one single voice that it was against your cousin's will or without her knowledge. And you also, would you not cry out to the detractors—You spoke falsely! The proof of her respectability is that she is my betrothed, and I am going to marry her?'"

"Very well. What did you reply to this question?"

"I made no reply. It was repulsive to me to discuss Emilie and my secret sentiment with a person who cannot comprehend human feelings."

"I regret that you found nothing to say."

"Tell me, father, do you think that Emilie—"

"Go on. Emilie—"

"She must know that her friend has been absent every evening for some days?"

"It seems to me impossible that she can be ignorant of it. The house at Vignolette is large, but in such a secluded life the absence of one of the two inmates must be noticed."

"Mademoiselle de Nives pretends that Emilie asks

no questions and manifests no uneasiness. How do you explain this?"

"By the religion of a generous hospitality. See the letter I received from her yesterday."

Henri read the letter and returned it. "I see," he said, "that in the bottom of her heart the good and dear child blames her strange companion. She is right. Did you notice that she was unhappy the last time you saw her?"

"Emilie unhappy? No, but displeased."

"Displeased with Mademoiselle Marie?"

"Evidently."

"And perhaps also with me?"

"I don't know what she thought about you."

"Mademoiselle de Nives pretends that Miette has a great sorrow."

"For what reason?"

"That is the reply I made; there is no reason for it. Miette is not in love with me."

"And you added, 'I am not in love with her?"

"No, father, I did not say so; I avoided speaking of myself; it could not interest Mademoiselle de Nives. What day will you receive her?"

"Here she runs the risk of meeting her stepmother, who may, who ought to return for her daughter at any moment."

"Madame de Nives cannot return yet; she is ill in Paris."

"Who told you so?"

"Mademoiselle de Nives has her closely watched. She caught influenza while running about Paris and the suburbs to surprise her stepdaughter in some *flagrante delicto* favorable to her hostile plans; but as she had only false information, she made no discoveries."

"This young woman may then come to the tower to-morrow with Miette. Your mother intends to make some calls at Riom, and will know nothing about it. I wish for your assistance at the interview, since you are Mademoiselle Marie's adviser. I shall, perhaps, call up Master Jacques, and give an order for Leonie to be brought to us for a little while. I want to see with my own eyes if this grand passion for the child is sincere. We will go to bed now. To-morrow, early I will send a messenger to Vignolette, and perhaps also to Champgousse."

"The next day I wrote to Emilie and her brother. At noon I went to the tower with Henri and little Leonie. We found Miette there with Mademoiselle de Nives. Jacques, who lived further off, arrived last.

My first word was an act of authority. Charliette was on the threshold of the kitchen, but, perceiving me, quickly took refuge within. I had seen her, however, and, addressing Mademoiselle de Nives, demanded to know if this woman was on the watch by her orders. Mademoiselle de Nives seemed surprised, and said she did not come with her.

"Then," replied I, "she comes on her own account, and I shall request her to leave."

I entered the kitchen without giving Marie time to get the start of me, and asked Charliette, who seemed quite distracted, what she was doing in my house. She replied that she had come to receive Mademoiselle Marie's orders.

"Mademoiselle Marie does not need you; go away. I forbid you to ever put your foot in my house without my permission."

"Ah!" cried Charliette, in a dramatic tone, "I see

that my dear young lady is ruined! You are all against her!"

"Go," I resumed; "and the quicker the better!"

She went away furious, and I rejoined the ladies in the apartment refurnished by Henri. Mademoiselle de Nives wore her village girl's costume, which, I must confess, was marvellously becoming to her. Lèonie threw herself into her arms, and they were inseparable. Emilie also caressed the child, and found her charming. I saw that at the last moment Marie had made a full confession. Henri appeared a little embarrassed in carrying out the part he had assumed. He heard opportunely the step of Jacques's pony, and went down to help him put it in the stable.

During this time, I kept moving about, and without having the appearance of wishing to enter upon the subject at once, I observed the features and attitude of Mademoiselle de Nives, and found her simple and sincere. This point gained, I examined my niece; she was changed, neither pale nor cast down, but serious, and as if armed for any combat with a high and magnanimous will.

Jacques entered, and met with a cordial welcome. He kissed respectfully the hand that Mademoiselle de Nives extended to him without the least embarrassment. He was much disconcerted by astonishment and uneasiness, and appeared to be nerving himself up for a crisis beyond his power to avert.

"Now," I said to Mademoiselle de Nives, "we are going to discuss matters that will be very tiresome to Mademoiselle Ninie. She may go and play in the meadow, directly under our eyes."

"Yes," cried Lēonie; "with Suzette!"

"By and by," I said. "I promise to let you see her again before she goes home."

"That is not true; you will not call me back!"

"I give you my promise," said Mademoiselle de Nives. "You must be good, and obey M. Chantebel. He is master here, and every one is glad to do as he wishes."

Ninie submitted, but not without making Suzette promise to sit near the window, where she could look at her every moment.

When we were seated, Miette began resolutely: "Uncle," she said, "you have consented to receive my friend, and I thank you for her and for myself. I think you have no need to question her in regard to the events that brought her under my roof, for I believe you are perfectly well acquainted with them. She comes to ask your counsel upon her future course, and as she knows what kind of a man you are, has for you the respect you merit, and places in you the confidence that is your due; she is resolved—so she promised me—to follow your advice implicitly."

"I have but one question to address to Mademoiselle de Nives," I replied; "and my opinion of her cause will depend upon her answer. Why, on the eve of the time fixed for her certain and absolute liberty, did she think it her duty to quit the convent?—Reply without fear, mademoiselle: I know you have much frankness and courage, and all the persons present are now in your confidence; it is important that I should be so also, and that we all deliberate upon what is most favorable to your interests."

"It is a sort of public confession you demand," replied Mademoiselle de Nives, who appeared much moved by the presence of Henri and Jacques; "but I can make it, and I will make it."

"We are listening respectfully."

"Well, M. Chantebel, I had a reason that you will scarcely credit for escaping from the convent before the proper time. My ignorance of real life was so profound —and this is not my fault—that I believed I must show a determination to stand up for my legal rights before I came of age. I was persuaded that, if I allowed one day to pass beyond that term, I was bound by that act to remain in the convent for life."

"Were you told this enormous falsehood in the convent?"

"No; my nurse Charliette pretended to have asked legal advice in Clermont, and advised me to distrust the patience with which the nuns and confessors awaited my decision. 'They will not harass you,' she said; 'they will surprise you, and suddenly say to you,—The hour has passed, we hold you for your whole life.'"

"And you believed Charliette?"

"I believed Charliette, having only her in the whole world to care for me, and tell me what I thought to be the truth."

"But since then you have found out she was deceiving you?"

"Do not make me say anything against this woman who rendered me great service—interested service, I know—but I availed myself of her aid, and am still receiving it. Let her go for what she is worth. This matter is unworthy of your attention."

"Excuse me, I must know if I am in the presence of a person counselled and directed by Charliette, or by the friends she has now around her."

"I am ashamed that it is necessary for me to reply that the persons present, commencing with yourself, are everything to me, and Charliette nothing."

"That is very well so far, but I must insist upon other conditions before I undertake to save you from the dangers and difficulties into which this Charliette has thrown you. You must swear that you will not see her again, nor have any correspondence or any kind of connection with her, so long as you remain with my niece. You ought to have understood that the presence of a woman of that character defiled the abode of Emilie Ormonde."

It was, I believe, the first time that Mademoiselle de Nives ever heard the plain truth. Frightened and menaced, on one side, by clerical thraldom; spoiled and flattered, on the other, by her nurse and the blind love of Jacques, she did not think she had anything to reproach herself with. She blushed with confusion, which appeared to me a good omen, hesitated a moment for a reply, then, by a spontaneous movement, turned to Miette and said, casting herself on her knees and throwing her arms around her: "Forgive me, I knew not what I was doing! Why did you not tell me?"

"I should have told you, if you had trusted me," replied Emilie, embracing and raising her. "Until this morning I did not know how guilty and contemptible this Charliette is."

"I will never see her again!" cried Mademoiselle de Nives.

"You swear it?" I said.

"I swear by my eternal salvation!"

"Swear upon your honor! Eternal salvation is never compromised so long as a moment for repentance remains. It is a beautiful idea to make God greater than the justice of men, but here we treat of facts purely human, and are solely occupied with matters that may be useful or injurious to our fellow creatures."

"I swear, then, upon my honor, never to see Charliette again, although, in truth, human honor, as usually understood, seems to me a frivolous thing."

"It is there the shoe pinches," I replied. "Will you permit me to make a little explanation that is very necessary?"

"I am listening," said Mademoiselle de Nives, sitting down again.

"Very well. When the expression 'human honor' has no clear meaning for the mind, it is best to withdraw from the social sphere and communion with mankind. One lives then in a sublime companionship with the divine Mind, and monastic rule imposing solitude and silence exempts one from all obligation to the human race. I know that you do not wish to choose this life; then, as maid or wife, consecrated to works of charity or to the occupations of this world, you must have a guide and master to teach you the obligations of life. You will do no good, entirely by yourself, outside of the cell, since you disdain to learn anything of practical life. You will need a spiritual director to utilize your charity, or a husband to regulate the propriety of your conduct. You are nearly twenty-one years old; you are fascinating, and conscious of your power, since you make use of your fascinations to carry out your plans from day to day. From the moment you begin to exert an influence upon the mind of others, you have no longer the right to say, 'I do not know what I shall do—I will see!' You must see, and decide at once; you must choose between a husband and a confessor, otherwise there is no means of dealing with you in earnest."

"What?" exclaimed Mademoiselle de Nives, who started up, astounded at my frankness; "what are you

saying to me, M. Chantebel? What do you demand of me?"

"Nothing but the free exercise of your will."

"But precisely!—I do not know my will. I wait for God to inspire me."

"Has God inspired you thus far? Did he command you to run away with Jacques Ormonde?"

"Uncle," cried Jacques, "you forced my secret from me, you had found it out before, and I thought it would be sacred with you, and now you are torturing me! Permit me to retire, I am stifling here, suffering martyrdom?"

"I do not blame you, Jacques," said Mademoiselle de Nives; "I intended to tell your uncle all that he knows already."

"More especially," I resumed, "since you confided it to my son, with permission to reveal everything to me."

Jacques became pale, looking at Henri, who remained unmoved. Then he looked at Marie, who cast down her eyes in confusion, then raised them immediately, and said, artlessly: "It is true, Jacques, I told everything to your cousin, for I needed his help to accomplish an enterprise in which you would have refused to aid me."

"You could not know," replied Jacques. "My cousin certainly merits all your confidence, but I had given you sufficient proof of my devotion to have a right to it also."

"You forget, Jacques," I said, "that when Mademoiselle de Nives needs any one, as she says herself, she goes directly to the point, without troubling herself about other people. She could, doubtless, have taken your arm to look at Léonie through the park-railing, or have accosted Henri in your presence, and made roman-

tic visits to him in this tower, the unquestionable innocence of which you could yourself have proved; but all this would not have succeeded so well. Henri would have distrusted a person presented by you, and consequently compromised. He would have reasoned and discussed, as I am nowdiscussing. It was much preferable to surprise him give him a mysterious rendezvous, confide herself to him like a sacred dove whose purity sanctifies all it touches, finally open her heart to him free from all attachment or consideration towards you. Experience has proved that Mademoiselle de Nives is not so much a stranger as one might think to the manner of action in real life, and that if she ignores the suffering she causes, she divines and appreciates the manner of making use of it."

"Henri!" cried Mademoiselle de Nives, pale and with clinched teeth, "do you share in the cruel opinion your father has of me?"

Henri's face was for a moment contracted with an expression of anguish and pity: then, suddenly gaining the ascendency with the heroism of a good conscience, he replied: "My father is severe, Mademoiselle Marie; but on the whole he says nothing that I did not say to you here last evening, while alone with you."

Mademoiselle de Nives then turned to Jacques, as if to demand from him aid and protection in her distress. She saw that he was weeping, and took a step towards him. Jacques took two, and, carried away by his good disposition as much as by his want of conventional manners, he threw his arms around her, and pressed her to his heart, saying: "Indeed, all this is not my fault! If you deserve blame in regard to me, I forget it all the moment you suffer! Will you have my blood, will you have my honor, will you have my life? They are all

yours, and I ask nothing in exchange, as you know very well."

For the first time in his life, thanks to the force of my attack, Jacques, struck to the heart, found real eloquence. The expression of the countenance, accent, gesture, everything was sincere, and consequently serious and strong. It was a revelation for us all, and especially for Mademoiselle de Nives, who had never before understood him. She was sensible of the injury she had done him, and read it in her own conscience. She started like a person seized with vertigo on the border of a precipice, and threw herself back; but she instinctively drew near again to the heart whose manly beating against her own she had felt for the first time, and from that resting-place addressed Emilie.

"You ought to make the severest reproaches to me," she said, "for I have been, it is plain, ungrateful to your brother, and a coquette with your cousin! As usual, you say nothing, and suffer without complaining. I promise solemnly to make amends for everything, and to be worthy of your friendship!"

"May God hear you mademoiselle!" I said, holding out my hand to her. "Pardon me for having made you suffer. I think I have unraveled the truth from the labyrinth into which Charliette threw you. I feel sure that henceforth you will reflect and engage in no more adventures, the consequences of which can be turned against you. Now we will talk about business, and see how you can be reinstated in your rights without making a scandal or commotion. Let me tell you that I accepted your stepmother's confidence upon one condition, that of acting as a peacemaker. I am not interested in her personally; but she did a wise thing: she knows that I adore children, that in every case where these

poor innocents are concerned I plead for their interests, and whether I was willing or not she trusted her daughter to me. There is poor Ninie, beautiful and good, and as far as I can see, but moderately happy. Her fate will be worse with a mother embittered by poverty."

"Say nothing more, M. Chantebel!" cried Mademoiselle de Nives. "Settle yourself, without consulting me, the sacrifices that I ought to make, then give me a pen, and I will sign without reading. You know the amount of my fortune, and I know nothing about it. Arrange everything to make Ninie as rich as I am. It was to tell you this that I wanted to see you!"

The generous girl turned toward the window while speaking thus, as if to throw a kiss to her sister; but, not seeing her, she called and received no reply. "Dear me!" she said, running to the door, "where can she be? I do not see her anywhere!"

At the same instant the door was thrown open impetuously, and Ninie rushed into Mademoiselle de Nives's arms, crying out in a voice broken by fear: "Hide me! hide me! Mamma! she is coming! she is running! she is on the stairs! she will find me, and whip me! Don't let mamma have me! Hide me?"

And she rapidly hid herself under the table, the thick covering of which reached to the floor.

CHAPTER XIII.

She was out just in time, Madame de Nives, pale and excited, entered in her turn, absolutely as if she were in her own house, without knocking or being announced. Marie turned her face to the window, leaving visible only

her black and white fichu, her blonde hair coquettishly curled, and her straw hat turned up behind. Miette, without being dressed as a peasant, wore as usual that pretty Auvergnat hat which blends with the new fashions in such a manner as to appear elegant without ceasing to be original.

"Excuse me, M. Chantebel," said Madame de Nives, who at the first glance took, or pretended to take, the two young ladies for peasant-girls: "you are here in consultation; I did not know it. A thousand pardons. I am looking for my daughter; I thought she was here. They told me at your house that you had taken her in this direction. Tell me where she is, that I may embrace her. I will wait in your garden till you have leisure to attend to me in my turn."

While the countess was talking I had glanced to the back part of the tower, visible through a window opposite to the one occupied by Mademoiselle de Nives, and had seen Charliette watching and waiting in the ruined and abandoned part of the manor. Therefore, Madame de Nives appeared to me perfectly well informed of what was going on, and I was unwilling to indulge her in a useless pretense.

"You will not disturb me, madame," I said. "I am here with my family. If there is a consultation, you will not be in the way." And, advancing an easy-chair for her, I added, "Mademoiselle Ninie is in this room; but she is in the midst of a game of 'hide-and seek,' and does not see you—Come, Ninie," I continued, raising the table cover, "it is your mamma; run and kiss her."

Ninie obeyed with a visible reluctance, Her mother seized rather than took her up, and seated her on her knee, saying, in a harsh tone; "What! are you crazy? Don't you know me?"

While Ninie was embracing her mother with more fear than love, Mademoiselle de Nives, anxious to know if the child was a victim as she had been told, turned round to observe this kiss. The clear, cold eyes of the countess were at once fixed upon hers, and I saw her tremble as at the sight of a viper. Doubtless she would not have recognized her stepdaughter immediately and under this disguise if she had not been informed of her presence. She was evidently prepared for the interview, as she did not mistake her for an instant for Miette, and a ferocious smile contracted her lips.

"You pretend, sir," she said, in a loud and clear voice, "that I shall not be in the way in the consultation I have interrupted. As far as I can see, the question to be settled is a marriage between two young ladies and two gentlemen. I am acquainted with one of the young ladies; which of the suitors is hers!"

"This one!" replied Mademoiselle de Nives without hesitation, taking my nephew's hand. "This is M. Jacques Ormonde. The banns will be published in a fortnight, and, although at that time your consent will be unnecessary, I hope, madame, you will deign to approve my choice, for the sake of propriety."

"It will be very necessary," replied the countess," "since this is the gentleman who, it appears, ran away with you."

"This gentleman," added Jacques, to whom happiness gave self-possession, "would suggest to the countess that Mademoiselle Ninie is out of place here, and would be better off amusing herself in the meadow."

"With Charlotte, who is still prowling about there?" I said, raising my voice; "no, take the child to her nurse, who is waiting for her among the vines, and come back

here yourself. If your future wife has to make any concessions, we shall need your approval."

"She may make as many concessions as she pleases," replied Jacques, taking Ninie by the hand, who followed him with an instinctive confidence; "she gave you full control of her affairs, and I do the same, uncle." And he led the child away, followed by the glance of the countess, who thought much less of her daughter than she did of examining the features and appearance of Jacques with a haughty and disdainful curiosity.

"There, then," she said, as soon as he had gone out, "is the object of Mademoiselle de Nives's great passion!"

"That young man is my nephew," I replied, "my dear sister's son, an excellent person, and a very worthy man."

"Or a very gallant man? M. Chantebel, you are indulgent, as is well known, to the members of your family! I see you find nothing worthy of condemnation in the elopement. It will not, however, be approved by every one."

"It will remain unknown, for no one here will divulge the secret, out of regard for Mademoiselle de Nives and you."

"For me? indeed!"

I made a sign to the others to draw away, and, approaching very near her, said, in a whisper: "For you, madame, who agreed with Charliette to bring about this scandal, and dishonor Mademoiselle de Nives!"

She became pale, as if she were going to faint; but, making a strong effort, she replied, in a low voice; "This woman has told a frightful lie, and you will never be able to prove it!"

"Shall I call her? She is still there."

"Why call her!" she replied, with a wild look.

"You can summon her before us all to tell the truth. The recompense you promised her will be at this price; and, if necessary, we can raise a subscription amongst ourselves that will unloose her tongue. She will produce your letters."

The countess feebly murmured these words: "You must not do that! I am in your hands—spare me!"

Then she sank back in her chair in a real fainting-fit. I had guessed right, for I learned the details afterwards. Charliette had, of course, fleeced, taken advantage of, deceived, and betrayed every one in turn.

My niece and Mademoiselle de Nives came eagerly to Madame de Nives's assistance. She recovered her senses very quickly, and wanted to renew the conversation. I begged her not to fatigue herself uselessly. "We can," I said, "renew the conference later this evening or to-morrow."

"No, no," she said, "at once, especially as I have nothing to say. I have simply to wait for the propositions that it will be thought necessary to make to me on the eve of a general settlement of our interests."

"There are no propositions to be made," I replied. "You thought that Mademoiselle de Nives, having been led to commit acts of grave imprudence, would need silence and a generous pardon on your part. Things are changed now, as you have just seen. Silence is for the common interest, and pardon is only a matter of politeness—say, rather, of Christian charity. Mademoiselle de Nives is absolute mistress of a considerable fortune. I know now the amount of it, for I procured it during your absence. She has a right to ask you for your accounts of guardianship, which, as I had foreseen and calculated, will amount to about two hundred and forty thousand francs; but she does not want her sister to be brought

up in constraint and privation. She will give you an unconditional receipt for all sums expended or economized by you during her minority. It is for you, madame, to address to her—I will not say thanks—but at least to give evidence of the satisfaction a mother ought to feel under such circumstances."

Madame de Nives had expected to make a better bargain by her unworthy plots. She was checkmated and overwhelmed. She tried to speak, but she could not utter a word, and treated Mademoiselle Marie to a sort of grimacing smile, with a jerk of the head. She recovered, however, strength enough to say that Léonie would still be very poor, since the possibility of laying aside even a small sum in the large and expensive Château de Nives was an entirely gratuitous supposition on my part.

"I know nothing about it," replied Mademoiselle de Nives, rising. "M. Chantebel, would you be kind enough to tell me the amount of my income as nearly as you can?"

"If you sell the Nives estate, mademoiselle, you will have an income of about fifty thousand francs. If you keep it, you will have thirty thousand."

"And now," she resumed, "will you ask Madame de Nives how large an income she requires to live in ease and security!"

"I shall never enjoy those two blessings again," said the countess; "I must have at least fifteen thousand francs a year to bring up my daughter, without letting her feel the change in her situation."

"That, with your small savings, of which I also know the amount, will give you the means of living in the same manner as you have done since your marriage. Mademoiselle de Nives must decide if your affection for her merits such a sacrifice."

"I will do it!" cried Marie, without a moment's hesitation; and, perceiving Jacques, who was just entering the room, she took his hand, adding: "We will make the sacrifice; but upon one condition, without which I shall adhere to the conditions that M. Chantebel has drawn up—the unconditional receipt."

"What, then, is this condition?" inquired Madame de Nives, whose piercing eyes shone with a metallic lustre.

"You must give my sister to me, and resign all your rights over her to me. At this price you will be rich, live where you please—excepting at Nives, where I intend to dwell myself. You will see Léonie; but she will be mine, mine alone!—Jacques! you consent?"

"Joyfully!" he replied, without hesitation.

Madame de Nives did not appear thunderstruck, as she should have done in conformity to the character she was playing. The idea was not new to her. Marie had mentioned it to Charliette, and the countess had had time to reflect upon it. She feigned, however, a new fainting-fit, more finished, but less real than the first. Marie and Miette were very much moved.

"This is too cruel!" exclaimed my niece; "this lady is ill, and cannot bear such emotion. She may be wicked—that is possible; but she cannot be indifferent to her daughter, and you are demanding too much of her!"

"Leave me alone with her," I said; "and do not be alarmed. Go to the house and wait for me, and, if Madame Chantebel has returned, tell her to have a good dinner ready to set us right after all the excitement of the morning.

When they had gone, Madame de Nives did not keep me waiting long before she recovered possession of her faculties. She shed a few tears when resuming the sub-

ject, exclaiming that it was horrible, and that Mademoiselle de Nives took her revenge in an atrocious manner.

"Mademoiselle de Nives does not wish for revenge," I replied. "She possesses in reality a remarkable sweetness and gentleness. She has not addressed to you one bitter word under circumstances where the wrong you have done her would naturally turn her heart against you. She has taken a great fancy to Léonie, and I think the child returns it as far as she knows how."

"It is certain my daughter loves every one excepting her mother! She has a terrible disposition. She was taught to dislike me when she was very young."

"I know it, and it is a great misfortune; but it is partly your own fault, for you have not taken the right course to make yourself loved by her and respected by your servants."

"You cannot, however, advise me to abandon her to a crazy woman who has taken a passing fancy for her, and will soon cease to care for her."

"When she ceases to care for her, she will send her back to you; but then you must bid farewell to your income of fifteen thousand francs! Pray, then, in earnest, that the two sisters may live happily together!"

I saw plainly that Madame de Nives perceived the justice of the argument. She still discussed the question, however, for the sake of appearances. "You realy think, then," she resumed, "that Mademoiselle de Nives is capable of bringing up a young girl in a suitable manner?"

"If you had asked this question yesterday, I should have said, 'No, I do not think so.' I did not then fully know her; while to-day, here in your presence, I felt a great admiration for her. This childlike generosity has a sublime aspect that exalts it above the trifling mistakes

of an over excited imagination. I had just been finding great fault with her when you entered! she punished me by showing an admirable repentance and sincerity. I am now entirely on her side, which will not prevent me from serving you in taking care that payment of your income shall be made a serious and inviolable contract."

"Ah, yes! that is of special importance!" cried the countess, involuntarily. "This allowance must not be a lure."

"Neither must it be an extortion," I replied; "the allowance will cease on the day when you reassert your claim to Léonie."

"That is understood," said the countess, in an angry tone; "but if Mademoiselle Marie, who knows nothing about money, should ruin herself! I must have a mortgage on the Nives estate."

"You shall have it; but do not fear that she will ruin herself; on the contrary, the moment she marries Jacques Ormonde she will grow richer and richer."

"Will this famous Jacques Ormonde, who is called the lady-killer, make his wife, and, consequently, my daughter, happy?"

"This lady-killer has the best heart in the world, and a natural disposition of the finest water."

"And, while awaiting the marriage, what shall I do with my daughter, who thinks of nothing but running away from me, and to whose absence I must become gradually accustomed, in order to have courage to leave her entirely?"

"You will to go to Nives to make preparations for your departure. Ninie will stay at my house with MademoiselleMarie, who, being betrothed to Jacques, will remain under the protection of her future uncle.'

"But your son—your son has just had—I know it very well—an intrigue with her!"

"That is one of Charliette's lies. My son is an honest man and a serious-minded man. It is possible that Charliette wanted to make money out of him also; but he is sharper than Jacques. Meanwhile, as we must not give occasion for gossip, my son will pass the rest of his vacation with his cousin at Champgousse, and will not return home until the marriage takes place. We will sign on that day the deeds that concern you at the same time as the marriage-contract, and, for the present, as you have recovered your self-possession, you will dine at our house with my family and yours."

"Impossible! I cannot see all those people; Ninie especially! That child, who leaves me with joy in her heart, is my punishment."

"It is a deserved punishment, Madame de Nives! You wished to debase, ruin, and dishonor your husband's daughter—you were determined either to make her a nun or to destroy her character forever! It was too much; you even wearied the patience of God. Do not abuse that of men; and take every precaution to keep them in ignorance of the secret designs of your guilty soul. Offer your daughter as a recompense for your cruel deeds, and accept in return the wordly wealth for which you have worked with so much perseverance and so little scruple. You must dine with me, since you have told my wife everything you could think of against Mademoiselle Marie. I do not ask you to confess your guilt nor to retract your words; but we will tell her that you are reconciled with your stepdaughter, and that, through my efforts, an arrangement has been made satisfactory to all parties concerned."

CHAPTER XIV.

Madame de Nives yielded, took my arm, and we went together towards my house. As we came out of the pinewood I saw Charliette, who was watching us, very much disturbed on her own account at the result of our conference. "We must settle with this jade," I said to the countess.

"No, no!" she replied, in terror; "I never want to see her again."

"For that very reason she must be paid."

And, turning towards Charliette, I made her a sign to come to us. She quickly obeyed the summons.

"The time for settling your accounts has arrived," I said; "we have all agreed to have nothing more to do with you. M. Jacques Ormonde has paid you three thousand francs—it is more than you deserve. He has no further need of you. Mademoiselle de Nives will also give you three thousand francs. How much has the Countess de Nives, who is here present, promised you?"

"Ten thousand," replied Charliette, boldly.

"Only five thousand," replied the countess, bristling with indignation.

"On the day when Mademoiselle de Nives comes of age," I rejoined, "you can come to my house to receive the sum of eight thousand francs, after which you will have nothing more to expect from any one."

"That is little for so much work," replied Charliette. "If I told all that I know—"

"You can tell it if it pleases you to be driven away in all quarters as a promoter of intrigue, and a vile woman. If you talk about us, we will talk about you also; beware!"

Charliette, frightened by my words, went off as quickly as possible, and, during the ten minutes it took us to reach my house, I saw that Madame de Nives was rapidly recovering her self-composure. This woman, whose sole impelling power and sole passion was avarice, horrified me. I was none the less very polite, respectful, and attentive to her. I had told her some plain truths, and had gained a good cause. I had no angry feeling to excite me, and I was satisfied with myself. I conducted her to a room, as she wished to rest for a little while.

Madame Chantebel had not returned. Miette had courageously gone to work to prepare the dinner. She understood the art of cooking, was well acquainted with my tastes, and much beloved by my servants. I saw with pleasure that we should have a good dinner, and that no dish would be a failure—my wife not being there to excite the nerves of the cook by giving too many directions. It gave me still greater pleasure to see Henri smiling at Miette's side, and helping her in the most lively mood; he had taken off his coat and put on a white apron. This was so contrary to his tastes and usual serious bearing, that I could not conceal my surprise.

"What would you have?" he said; "there are dramatic and romantic heroines here who would be very much puzzled to know how to make a simple omelet. Emilie, who is in my eyes the only and true heroine of the day, and who makes no effort to attract attention, consecrates herself to our service as if she were good for nothing else. It is only just for me to save her all the

trouble I can, or at least make her laugh by my awkwardness."

And, as Miette went away to look after her pastry—"See," he said, "how skilful and quick she is! With her silk dress and lace fichu, she takes no precautions, and yet she will not soil them with a single spot. She is in her element—home, country and domestic life."

"We must leave her there," I replied, with a malicious purpose. "Such a condition is not poetic enough for a young man of the present time."

"I beg your pardon, father, I find it entirely sufficient! Poetry is present everywhere, if one has the eye to see it. It was at Vignolette in the old times, when, in the very middle of her great, black kitchen, where the huge copper vessels shone so brightly, I looked at Miette as she kneaded in her pretty fingers the cakes for our breakfast. It was a Rembrandt with one of Corregio's figures in the centre. Then I felt the charm of that everyday intercourse, and of this model woman. I forgot everything, but now I again see the past through the revived medium. Miette is much more beautiful than she was in those days, and has become much more graceful, Besides, I am hungry; the smell of the food seems to me delicious. The animal is in harmony with the poet in crying out: 'Here is the truth—a well-regulated and well-appointed existence, an adorable wife, an inexhaustible depth of confidence, mutual respect and tenderness.'"

"You have come to a full comprehension of the heart as well as the reason. Will you not tell this to Emilie?"

"No, I dare not; I am not yet worthy of forgiveness. I know Miette has suffered by my fault: she believed for a day or two that I was in love with the heiress, and that I was willing to compromise her reputation to get her away from Jacques. Without you, dear father—without

the full explanations made to-day, she would, perhaps, still believe it. Do you know you frightened me for a moment? But, when you put me under the necessity of telling Mademoiselle de Nives before you all what I ought to think, and what I really had thought, of her frivolity, I understood that you were rendering me a great service, and I regained at once my self-control and determined to do as you desired. If Marie's odd ways surprised me for a little while, no one but myself must ever know it, and, if she felt any doubt in regard to the matter, I am glad you gave me the opportunity to remove the impression. She belongs to Jacques, certainly, and to no one else. She has a noble character, notwithstanding her childish triviality. Jacques has the great good sense that is wanting in her, and, since he loves her dearly, will impart it to her unconsciously, without wounding her pride. He will always say the same as her; but he will do it in such a way that in her turn she will think like him."

"Very well reasoned, my son, and now may God grant us his aid! In these results that pressing circumstances often force us to improvise, life strongly resembles a pleasing romance. I own that, in pleading before you the cause of reason and right, I did not expect such a success—I did not see that two beautiful and good marriages would result from my simple and sincere words. But where are our lovers?"

"Over there, on that bench you see from here. I believe they are waiting impatiently for the countess's decision in regard to Ninie. Do you think she will give her up?"

"That point is already gained," I replied, "and I must hasten to tell them so."

Miette at this moment came towards us with her pastry ready to put into the oven. "I am not in the habit

of embracing my cooks," I said, kissing her on the forehead; "but this one is so much to my taste that I cannot refrain."

Jacques and Marie, seeing me leave the kitchen, ran to meet me with Ninie. "Well," said Mademoiselle de Nives, pointing to the child, "may I hope?"

"She is yours!" I replied, in a low tone, "Do not say a word, and endeavor to avoid additional trouble by inducing her to bid farewell to her mother properly."

"That is easy," said Jacques; and, taking Ninie in his arms: "Listen, mademoiselle; your mamma, seeing that you are very well here, and very fond of us, consents to leave you a few days longer with Suzette at Papa Bébel's. You will certainly thank her for her kindness? You will embrace her, and be very good, will you not?"

"Yes, yes!" cried the child, beside herself with joy; "I will be very good. What happiness!—We shall go after dinner to the fountain with Suzette and my hobby-horse, Henri."

"It is I who will be the hobby-horse," replied Jacques, smiling, "and Suzette will make the boats."

"Have you pardoned me," I said to Mademoiselle de Nives, "and will you consent to remain here until your marriage?"

Marie took my hands with that charming outpouring of the heart that atoned for every fault, and, in spite of my resistance, pressed her lips to them. "You have saved me," she said; "you are and you will be my father! I need so much to be directed and to be really loved! You must make me worthy of dear Jacques, who spoils me, and from whom I cannot draw the slightest reproach."

"Then I will scold you, and he will console you. He will tell you that you are perfection."

"Yes, indeed," exclaimed Jacques, "I shall say so!"

"And that I am an old dotard."

"As to that, no," he replied, half stifling me as he pressed me to his breast; "you will always be our guardian angel."

Meantime my wife arrived, and her arms dropped with surprise when she saw me embracing the lovers. Her eyes were not large enough to examine the countenance and costume of Mademoiselle de Nives.

"Madame Chantebel," I said, "while presenting her, "be kind enough, I beg you, to bless and embrace your future niece, a peasant-girl, as you see, but very well-born, and worthy of your affectionate interest."

"Is this a joke!" asked my wife; "would Jacques marry in this way, and at once, a person with whom we are not acquainted?"

"A few words, madame, will make you acquainted with me," said Mademoiselle de Nives. "I came to Percemont in disguise to consult M. Chantebel. He has expressed his approval of my marriage with Jacques Ormonde. My stepmother arrived unexpectedly. M. Chantebel brought about a reconciliation between us, and she even consented to bestow on me an inestimable treasure—the child whom you see playing yonder, whom you love also, and who will become mine."

"The child! your stepmother! I do not understand you at all," said my wife, astounded. "Is it a wager to mystify me?"

"Look," I said, "at that beautiful lady who is adjusting her toilet, and passing and repassing before the window of chamber number two in your house."

"The Countess de Nives! Is she here?"

"And Mademoiselle Marie de Nives also."

"And the countess gives her daughter—she gives Ninie to—"

"To the person of whom she has spoken so unkindly, and who does not deserve it. Did I not tell you that your great countess was a fraud?"

"I find the word very mild now, but I suppose there is money in all this?"

"A great deal of money, for Mademoiselle de Nives does not count the cost when her heart speaks, and her act is still more worthy of commendation since she had nothing to fear from the calumny that menaced her. Emilie, Jacques, Henri, and I, at their head were present to defend and exonerate her."

"And you still receive this countess? She has made herself at home!"

"Until this evening only. She has been very much agitated and we are taking care of her. She is going to dine with us."

"To dine with us, indeed! And I not at home! And with an ignorant cook, who has no brains!"

"Therefore I have found another, a wonder whom I wish to present to you. Will you not embrace your future niece?"

Marie approached gracefully and confidently. Madame Chantebel was much moved, and, when after the embrace, Mademoiselle de Nives took her hand to kiss in token of respect, my wife had tears in her eyes; she was conquered.

"This does not prevent me from thinking," she said, as we were on our way to the kitchen, "that Jacques's marriage is remarkable, and far above his condition. Since you understand so well how to perform miracles, M. Chantebel, why did you not think of your own son before any one else? Henri would have been a much

more suitable and agreeable husband for this young lady in all respects than the great Jacques."

"My dear wife," I replied, "listen to me. Leave the cooking to take care of itself—everything is going on as well as you can desire; let us talk a little while under these trees, like two old friends who ought to have but one heart and one will."

I related to my wife all that had passed, and added: "You see plainly that Mademoiselle de Nives waited for and hoped for with good reason by Jacques, could not be the wife of any one else, unless it were of an ambitious person, entirely without scruple."

"You are right, M. Chantebel, I do not deny it; only I regret—"

"There is nothing to regret. Henri will be happy in his marriage, happier than any one in the world!"

"I see what you are driving at, M. Chantebel! You wish him to marry your Miette Ormonde!"

"He wishes it also; he loves her."

"It is you who make him think so."

"No, I was very careful not to use any influence in the matter; it would have been the means of estranging him from her, and I am not so foolish. What have you, then, against my poor Miette?"

"Against her? Nothing, to be sure—I do justice to her merits; but it is—it is her hat."

"Her village hat? Why Mademoiselle de Nives has one on to-day exactly like it, and looks none the less like a countess."

"Yes, but she is one in reality—that is easily seen."

"And you think that our Miette looks like an ungainly woman?"

"No, she resembles her mother, who resembled you.

There is nothing common in our family; but Miette is cold, she does not love Henri."

"Ah, there is your mistake! Miette appears cold to you because she is dignified and spirited. I thought you would understand her, for I remember some one whom I loved and sought in marriage—a long time ago. This person was jealous of a little blonde, without the least occasion, whom I asked to dance with me, I know not why, at a ball. My lady-love wept, but I knew nothing about it, and she never confessed her resentment until after our marriage."

"That person was myself," replied my wife; "and I own I should sooner have been cut to pieces than confess that I was jealous."

"Why so, tell me?"

"Because—because jealousy is a feeling that leads us to doubt the man we love. If we were sure that he was deceiving us, we should cease to care for him; but we are not sure; we are afraid of offending him and of lowering ourselves in his estimation by the avowal of our distrust."

"Very well explained, wife. And, then, one suffers all the more from the effort to conceal it?"

"One suffers much, and must exercise great fortitude! Do you think that Miette has that fortitude?"

"And that endurance! All the more since her pride has been wounded by some one."

"By whom!"

"That is the very thing I want to know."

"Is it perhaps by me?"

"That is impossible."

"Well, it is the truth. I spoke sharply to her, because she seemed to think Henri would stay in Paris. I confess I was afraid of it also, and was out of temper

about it. I vented my spite on poor Emilie, and don't know what I said to her. She went away in consternation, and, as I have not seen her since, I supposed she was in the sulks; but I assure you I bear her no ill-will, and love her as much as ever."

"Will you tell her so?"

"At once. You say she is here; where is she hiding?"

"In the kitchen, with Henri."

"Henri in the kitchen? This is, indeed, something new! He, so aristocratic!"

"He declares that nothing is so distinguished as a young and beautiful girl engaged in the duties of housekeeping, and nothing so deserving of respect as the mother of a family like you taking care of the well-being of the household."

"That means that I ought to go and see to the dinner?"

"It means that Emilie has it in charge already, and that Henri looks upon her when he says the woman he loves will be a person useful, serious, devoted, and charming like his mother."

"M. Chantebel, you have a golden tongue! The serpent had a voice like yours in paradise. You do with me whatever you please, and pretend all the time that I am the mistress!"

"Yes, you are the mistress; for, if you are unwilling to receive Miette, Henri and I must give her up.

Just at this moment Henri came to announce that dinner was ready, and, reading from the expression of my eyes the favorable condition of affairs, he embraced his mother, and said to her: "Mother, I have a secret to tell you after dinner."

"Tell it immediately," she replied, much excited. "Dinner will wait. I want to know everything!"

"Very well. Only two words are required, my dear mother. I love Emilie—I have always loved her; but I do not wish to tell her so without your permission."

My dear, good wife did not reply, but ran to the kitchen. She found Miette in the pantry, washing and wiping her pretty hands. She took her by the shoulders, then by the neck, and embraced her maternally several times. Miette returned the caresses with her eyes full of tears and a charming smile upon her lips.

"There is no need of any other explanation," I said; "this is the best of all."

Henri thanked and embraced his mother also, and then we went to take our places at the dinner-table. The dinner was so good that, notwithstanding the great constraint of the first moment, we could not resist the animal, though at the same time profoundly cordial understanding of persons who hold social communion together after the fatigue of a struggle and the relief of a reconciliation. I do not like to eat much or for a long time, but I like a table elegantly supplied with choice viands. Our thoughts, our faculties, our intellectual and moral disposition, depend much upon the delicacy or the grossness of the food we have assimulated. My wife, a much poorer eater than I, was almost greedy on this occasion, with the intention—very evident to me—of complimenting Emilie, and showing her that she admitted her superiority.

As I like to study character, and every action has a significance in my mind, I remarked that Mademoiselle de Nives ate nothing but creams, fruits, and sweets, while Madam Alix de Nives, with her extreme thinness, had the robust appetite of avaricious persons who dine at

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other people's expense. Burly Jacques swallowed everything cheerfully, with a sincere and hearty flow of spirits; but this angular person, with her pinched-up mouth and handsome, straight nose, too flat underneath, appeared to be carefully storing a supply of provisions in her stomach, as certain animals do in their nests at the approach of winter. Vice is an ugly thing, and the description of it is disagreeable, since it is impossible to refrain from seeing its serious side; but, when one has escaped from its snares, one may be permitted to perceive its ludicrous aspect, and amuse oneself inwardly as I did in replenishing the countess's plate; she was seated at my right hand, and treated by us all with every appearance of the most devoted hospitality. Ninie's chair had been placed next to her's; she insisted, however, with a great deal of affectation, on her sitting next to Mademoiselle de Nives.

"By the side of Suzette!" exclaimed the child. "Ah, mamma, how kind you are!"

"These are the first affectionate words she has addressed to me in her life," said Madame Alix to me in a low voice.

"They will not be the last," I replied. "She was left to your servants too much, and learned distrust and rebellion from their evil example. Now she will be brought up in the right way by generous souls, and will learn to respect you."

Very much at ease in regard to future proceedings, we put Madame de Nives into her carriage at dusk, and Marie placed the child in her arms for the last time, promising to see her again in a fortnight. Madame Alix pretended to be much affected at parting with her child, and made the movements of a person whose sobs prevent utterance; then turning to me while giving back

Ninie—"Remember," she said, "I must have a mortgage."

As the carriage departed I indulged in an immoderate outburst of laughter, which amazed Miette and my wife, the one as simple-hearted as the other, and all disposed to be sympathetic.

"Indeed, M. Chantebel, your heart is too hard!" cried Bébelle; for, following Mademoiselle Ninie's example, we all called my wife by this nickname.

"Oh, you wise woman!" I replied, "you are pitying the vulture that digests comfortably the fortune that has been given her with the dinner that has been served for her."

When I had talked freely with my dear family, Jacques Ormonde raised an objection to one part of my plan. "I ask nothing better," he said, "than to return to Champgousse, where I am thoroughly domesticated; but I confess that I am no longer so eager to build a house there for my own use since Mademoiselle Marie prefers to live in her chateau, and I have no reason for regretting my small farm. The country is not lively, and my dog-hole is already becoming too contracted for me, though all by myself. I think that, even for a fortnight, Henri, whom you condemn to this exile, will be very uncomfortable. I propose an amendment; two beds can be carried to the Tower of Percemont, we shall be pleasantly located there, and nearer you, while the proprieties will be equally observed."

"No, that is too near," I replied. "We all need a short season of reflective and philosophical retirement before being reunited in the intoxication of happiness; but I will soften the sentence, for I also find Champgousse too far off, and I would like to have you both where I can conveniently discuss with you questions of

importance in regard to future arrangements. Henri admires Vignolette, which is within a stone's throw, and we need Emelie at our house for all kinds of preparations. She must stay here, and you will reside at your sister's with my son."

This conclusion was adopted, and we found it very convenient to dine together every Sunday either at Vignolette or at my house.

I plainly foresaw that Jacques's marriage could not take place until six weeks. We needed that time to regulate the settlement of Ninie's fortune, and the conditions on which it was to be held. And then I did not wish to hurry this marriage which had been brought about so unexpectedly. I knew, indeed, that Mademoiselle de Nives would have no reason to repent of her choice, but for all that she needed time for reflection, and I wished to devote all the time possible to her intellectual and moral education.

The dear child made the task easy for me. I discussed with her the delicate questions concerning love, marriage, and monastic celibacy. I discovered in her some regret for that renunciation that had always been held up to her as a condition of grandeur and purity, and had to destroy many false ideas regarding the world and domestic life. She could not have, and did not have, any systematic defence; she was, fortunately, very ignorant. I had nothing to combat but an exaltation of feeling; I made her understand that the most important employment of our powers and resources is to bring up a family and to give to humanity members worthy the name of men. I initiated her into a respect for that sacred law which she had been educated to regard as the worst thing possible for the true purpose and attainments of the soul. She listened to me with surprise, but also

with earnest interest, and, very sensible to the good influence of intelligible and friendly words, declared that no teacher had ever moved and delighted her as I did.

The excellent Emilie, on her side, gave her the necessary instruction. She had already undertaken at Vignolette to interest her in a judicious course of reading; but, preoccupied or over-excited, the pupil had fatigued the mistress to no purpose. Now she was attentive and docile. Intelligence was not wanting, and I must say that Miette with her serene simplicity was an admirable teacher. Miette liked to do well everything she undertook. At the convent, which she entered as a peasant, she came out knowing everything better than her companions, and she had continued her studies since her return to her own home. She had always consulted me in the choice of books, and, when she had read them, came to discuss them with me, to present her objections, and to ask me to solve them. I saw then that she had read, and read well, and admired the peaceful harmony that reigned in her brain, which still retained its freshness and healthy action in spite of the constant exercise of the will and the rigid performance of moral obligations. I understood perfectly the worth of the woman I wished to bestow upon my son; and Mademoiselle de Nives, who until the present time had known only the patience and kindness of heart, now comprehended the superiority of her companion. At the end of a month she knew enough to have no longer the resource of saying she was too ignorant to be judicious.

CHAPTER XV.

When Marie was twenty-one years old, that is about a fortnight after she took up her abode with me, and when all her affairs were settled, signed, authenticated, and terminated, and when Madame Alix, satisfied and delighted, had taken flight for Monaco, where she wished to pass the winter, Jacques Ormonde came with Henri to take possession of the Tower of Percemont. The weather was still fine, the chimneys did not smoke, and we saw each other every day. Mademoiselle Ninie went to make boats with her sister as often as she wished, and Bébelle had the table well served all the time without giving herself any trouble, and without having dramatic scenes with the cook. Miette, after finishing her duty as teacher, hastened to pluck a partridge or make butter. Nothing was ever behindhand for a moment, even when my wife, who had a restless nature, anticipated the time fixed by herself for such a piece of work. Besides, Miette preserved without effort a blind submission, which is the *sine qua non* towards a provincial mother-in-law, and Bébelle thenceforth, finding herself satisfied in her legitimate pride as a housewife, gave the absolute government of the household into my niece's hands, and avowed that repose was occasionally very pleasant.

Jacques Ormonde, during this time, was receiving great benefit from Henri's influence. Their *tête-a-tete* at Vignolette had been employed in mutual comprehension and appreciation of each other.

"We did not think of running about or of shooting,"

said Jacques. "Would you believe that we shut ourselves up at Vignolette like two hermits, and that the only exercise we took was to walk in the vineyards or the garden while we talked together from morning till evening? We had so much to say to each other! Truly we were but little acquainted before. Henri confessed to me that he thought I was all stomach. I owned to him that I thought he was all brain.

We discovered that we had, above all, hearts that understood each other perfectly. Emilie will find her cellar in as good order as when she gave us the keys. We drank nothing but the water of Anval. We felt from the beginning that we were sufficiently excited by the stirring emotions our souls had experienced."

"This is the reason you look refreshed, and like one rejuvenated. Continue this regimen, my dear boy, and in a few weeks time you will again become the handsome Jacquet."

"Never fear, uncle; I see now how it happens that, after having been the favorite of so many women who were good judges, I ran aground against a little schoolgirl who, without your aid, never would have loved me. I must now recover the power of pleasing. I have no desire to make myself a laughing-stock the first time I kiss my intended wife."

"Add one thing more," said Henri; "that you made sober reflections upon the duties of life, such as you never took time to make before! We make mutual confessions; one was no better than the other; but we touched upon each other's faults more lightly. 'You were too lenient.' I was too severe; we mean, however, to walk henceforth in the true path, and, if our life is not beautiful and good, I hope it will not be our fault any longer."

Jacques left us to join Marie and Ninie—who, very conveniently, clung to her sister like a shadow—in gathering the fresh bouquet that every day adorned our family table. The frost was not yet severe. The garden still contained some splendid chinaasters, model tea-roses, mignonette and heliotrope, in abundance, and many varieties of mallows, the beautiful, curled leaves of which enliven and embellish the pyramids of fruit at dessert.

"Come, now," I said to Henri, "what are you going to tell me of yourself? You have said nothing to Miette, I know—"

"And I shall say nothing to her," he replied. "I cannot think of the proper words, my heart is too full. I found again at Vignolette all the sweetness of my first intoxication; every leaf, every blade of grass, was a page of my life, and brought back to me a pure and burning image of the past. Emilie's abode is a sanctuary for me. Would you believe that I did not allow myself to look into her chamber, even from the outside, though the casements were often left open? I was contented with examining the embroidery on her furniture; every stitch patiently shaded and brought into line was a reproach to the hours I had lost or employed unworthily when far away from her. What a frightful contrast there is between the life of a pure girl and a gay young man, even among the least depraved of his class! Emilie is already twenty-two years old; she has passed three or four years in waiting to see if my will and pleasure would bring me back to her, the most trying years, perhaps, in a woman's life! She has risen above the endurance of solitude, or has accepted it; a glance at the velvet-down of her cheeks, at the purity of her smooth eyelids and rosy lips, gives abundant proof that an immodest idea, or simply a bold

one, has never thrown its shadow over this flower, this precious diamond.

"Jacques, in his hours of unreserved confidence, confessed his many indiscretions, and I did not laugh, for I remembered my own shortcomings. If I have become reconciled with myself on account of my good resolutions, I cannot yet get rid of a feeling of shame in Emilie's presence. Here we are reunited at last, living under each other's eyes. Every moment when I can approach her without being intrusive, I seek her smile, offer my assistance, or talk with her of old times, that is, of our old and happy love! I see plainly she has not forgotten the enjoyment of the past; she is pleased with my good memory, and smiles or sighs at the remembrance of our childish joys and sorrows. She understands, certainly, that I am not ardently reviving all this past in order to bury it in barren regret; but when I am ready to put into the present the word *happiness*, I perceive the necessity of commencing with that of *forgiveness*, and feeling that years of reparation can alone give me this right. I cannot say a single word. When, then, alas! shall I see the day draw near, in which I can say to her, 'Be my wife!'"

"Do not be so foolish," I said to him. "Ignore your scruples, and ask her at the first opportunity."

Shortly afterwards, Emilie passed us with a basket of ripe grapes gracefully posed upon her head. If she had been a coquette, she could not have chosen a richer or more becoming headdress. The delicate vine branches, with their varied shades of vivid color, hung down over her dark hair, and the grapes, brilliant as garnets, formed a diadem on her beautiful brow, as pure and proud as that of a chaste nymph.

"Miette," said Henri, who drew her towards me, "will you be wholly the daughter of your uncle, who loves

you so much, and the wife of your cousin, who adores you."

"If you think I deserve the happiness of being yours for ever," replied Miette, putting her arms around my neck, "take me, I belong to you."

The two marriages took place on the same day, and the two weddings made but one at the Maison-Blanche; then Henri and his wife went to pass a few days in their beloved solitude at Vignolette. Marie and her husband went away with Ninie to commence housekeeping in the fine old Chateau de Nives, which they were obliged to refurnish, for Madame Alix had naturally carried everything away, even to the tongs. Jacques appreciated the value of money, but he had the good sense to sympathize in his wife's disinterestedness, and, instead of being indignant, his feelings found expression in loud bursts of laughter, so that the avaricious despoliation of their home was for several days a source of much mirth.

Besides, everything was not lost. One evening Marie said to Jacques: "Take a pickaxe and shovel and we will explore the park. I intend, if my memory does not fail me, to give you the pleasure of digging up a treasure."

She searched a few minutes among the ferns which covered a remote corner of the park, and suddenly exclaimed: "This must be the place; here is the old box-wood tree; this is the place; work away!"

Jacques turned up the ground as she directed, and found an iron-bound casket, containing the diamonds of the late Countess de Nives. Some days before her death, foreseeing the ambition or distrusting the rapacious instincts of her successor, she had confided her secret to an old gardener, and had made him conceal her family jewels in this spot, directing him to inform her daughter

of the hidden treasure at a proper time. The gardener died a little while after; but his aged wife had shown the place to Marie, who had not forgotten it; to her these diamonds were doubly precious as imperishable souvenirs of her mother.

However, the newly-married pair were somewhat straightened pecuniarily during the first year of their marriage, but they scarcely perceived it. They were happy; they dearly loved Ninie, who repaid their devotion, and, though until this time she had been small and delicate, she soon became as plump as a skylark in full corn and as bright as a rose in the warm sunshine.

At the return of the fine season, I determined to celebrate St. John's day with all my family gathered around me, for St. John was my wife's patron saint. As all the young people were going to pass the day with us, I arranged a pleasant surprise, by giving them an elegant lunch at the Tower of Percemont. Henri had not welcomed the idea of shutting himself up permanently on this rock, for its isolation would interfere with our frequent intercourse; but, as it was one of the favorite goals for our walks, I had several rooms cleared up and furnished, particularly an elegant dining-room, where the table was set on a carpet of rose-leaves of different colors.

This Tower of Percemont was still a source of considerable pleasure to my wife, who liked to say to her friends, with a consequential air: "We do not live in it, we prefer our own house; these things are only superfluities with us." As for myself, I pardoned the old donjon the slight vexations it had caused me. In it I had obtained the greatest success of my life—a success gained by persuasion. It had decided the happiness of my children,

as well as that of poor little Léonie, who deserved to be loved—the sacred right of children.

All my dear guests met there once more in the enjoyment of a happiness that was touching to behold. Some letters were brought to me at dessert. The first that I opened was one announcing the marriage of the Countess Alix de Nives with M. Stuarton, an Englishman, hump-backed and rickety, but reputed to be worth millions. I had met him in Paris when I was a young man, and he had then reached maturity. Our inconsolable widow had undertaken to take care of him, with the hope of inheriting his fortune in a short time.

"Ah!" cried Madame Ormonde, in great consternation, "she is now richer than I am, and she will take Ninie away from me!"

"Do not be uneasy," I said; "that which is good to take is good to keep. Madame Alixwill soon be a widow, and Ninie would be a restraint upon her when seeking a third husband."

MARIANNE

CHAPTER I.

"WHERE can your thoughts be, Sleeping Beauty, as you ride along the groves on that lean shaggy horse of yours? I call you Beauty, yet you are not really handsome; you are too small and pale, and you want animation, there is not the slightest sparkle in your large dark eyes. But what can be the object of your ride, or the subject of your thoughts, as you pass along the groves without a suspicion of any one being there to see you? Your eyes look straight before them, gazing into the distance. Maybe your thoughts travel as far, or maybe they slumber, centerd in self!"

So soliloquized Pierre André, as Marianne Chevreuse, after slowly descending the hill beneath the walnut-trees, passed between him and the stream, and vanished at a hand gallop round the rocks, at the bend of the road.

Marianne was a young lady born in the country, who owned a good farm, yielding an income of five thousand francs or so, which represented a capital of two hundred thousand in that part of the world. She was considered

a tolerable match, yet she had reached the age of five and twenty without marrying. People said she was too fastidious, and somewhat eccentric, a failing far more dangerous than a vice in the eyes of her neighbors. They condemned her predilection for a hermit life, and could not at all understand how, when left an orphan at the age of twenty-two, she could have refused the offer made by her relations in town, an uncle and two aunts, to say nothing of three or four cousins, to take her to live with them and bring her out in society, where she might have had the opportunity of making a good match.

La Faille-sur-Gouvre was not an insignificant town. It had a population of four thousand; about thirty middle-class families, each worth from one to three hundred thousand francs, besides some well to do and highly respectable officials, in short, a circle, in which an heiress, however fastidious, might find some one to her fancy. Yet Marianne had preferred to live alone in the country house, which had been left her by her parents, in good repair and comfortably furnished, charmingly situated in an almost uninhabited tract of hill and woodland about two miles out of La Faille-sur-Gouvre.

This district, which lies near the centre of France, was remarkably quiet in character, especially fifty years ago, the date of this simple story. No gloomy drama had occurred there within the memory of man. Its peasantry are peaceful and well-disposed: they own their land, and mutually respect each other's rights. And yet houses are sparsely scattered over the district inhabited by Marianne and Pierre André, owing to the large tracts of moorland and coppice which are unproductive, and belong moreover in large lots to the principal families of the province.

Pierre André was nearly forty, and had been leading

a retired country life for the last year only, not far from Marianne Chevreuse, in a modest cottage, which he had been altering with the intention of ending his days there. Thus, while the young lady seemed about to enter on a life of solitude and dreams, seeking perhaps in the future for a solution which she had not yet found, the mature neighbor, who was her godfather, and had been her early friend, seemed to have severed every link that bound him to the past, and to look for nothing but repose and oblivion in a retreat that suited his fancy.

And yet Pierre André had been ambitious like other men. He was intelligent and studious, and had felt equal to anything in his youth. His mother had been proud of his early progress, and was ready to believe that he might turn out a great man. His father, who was poor and miserly, had consented, with much reluctance, to allow him to go and study law at Paris; but the poor fellow was kept so short of money that he had led a hard life of privation, without seeing any hope of raising himself above his cruel lot. He was an excelent talker, and a still better writer, but tormented with a bashfulness which formed a complete obstacle to his appearing in public, or becoming known beyond his immediate circle of friends. It was useless for him to think of the bar, and as to becoming an attorney or notary, beside his horror of legal quibbles, he felt convinced that his father would never consent to part with his small estate to secure him a practice. Even had he been willing to make this sacrifice, Pierre would not have accepted it, feeling that he lacked that special aptitude which could not assure his repaying his parents. He completed his legal course from a sense of duty, and then betook himself to other studies, but pursued none sufficiently closely to make it remunerative. He was fond of natural science, and mastered its

principal elements with no object beyond the exercise of his intellectual faculties and powers of observation. He had a gift for composition, and wrote a great deal, but published nothing, fearing that his productions were only second-rate. At length he met with something to suit him, in an engagement as travelling tutor to two young men of good position.

CHAPTER II.

It had been Pierre's dream to travel. He was a valuable travelling companion, communicating to his pupils just ideas of history and natural science in an agreeable way. He travelled with them all over Europe and part of Asia, and was recalled by their father's serious illness. His recovery left him so infirm that his sons were obliged to take his place at the head of their banking-house, and thus Pierre André's engagement came to an end.

He was then five and thirty and had put by ten thousand francs; his parents besought him to invest his money in land and come and settle near them. He spent some weeks with them, but soon grew wearied of a restricted life, quite foreign to his habits. He had acquired a taste for roving, and soon went off to Spain, which he had not fully explored; thence he crossed to Africa, and when he had come to the end of his savings he returned to Paris in search of fresh employment. Fortune did not favor him; he could only hear of paltry posts in the various government offices, and was forced to return to the dull treadmill life he knew only too well, working for

his livelihood and asking himself what was the use of living to protract such a hard, monotonous, colorless existence.

His father's sudden death, which followed on a lingering illness presenting no alarming symptoms, brought him back to his aged mother in the barren valleys of the Gouvre.

The poor woman had gone on cherishing her illusions respecting him, and was horrified to find that he had nothing to show for so many years of toil and exile, and thought himself happy in having contrived to exist on a scanty income without running into debt. She accused Paris, government, and society in general, of injustice and blindness in failing to recognize her son's merits. He never could make her see, that to elbow one's way through the crowd requires either great interest or great audacity, and that he was deficient in the latter qualification. His manner was lively, frank, and playful, but a want of self-confidence lurked beneath. He shrank from the ridicule which is heaped on unsuccessful ambition, and was too proud to complain or ask for assistance. He veiled his misery so proudly, that some of his friends never suspected his sufferings and failed to offer a helping or soothing hand, fancying that, thanks to his natural moderation and philosophic gayety, he was better off than themselves.

Yet Pierre had suffered keenly, less from the material privations on which his mind refused to dwell, than on the sad implacable solitude which gathers round a poor obscure man. His temperament was enthusiastic and artistic, but his feelings and inspirations found no outlet. He enjoyed the theatre, but could not afford to indulge his taste. He was fond of paintings and a good judge; but in order to enter on the requisite course of study,

he must have had means of subsistence, and he was forced to earn his daily bread. He was a passionate politician without any medium for communicating his ideas, and too much of a sceptic to become the hanger-on of any man or party. His love had been an intense but hopeless passion, devoted to superior beings exalted far above him. For months his enthusiasm was lavished on Pasta, whom he had seen once or twice on the stage, and every night that she acted, he waited at the door of the theatre, to see her flit past. Then he had fallen in love with Mademoiselle Mars, and dreamed of her voice and eyes till he became ill with desperation.

In his passion for these stars, he forgot to look at what came beneath his eyes, and when an opportunity for a reasonable attachment presented itself, said that reason and love were opposed. His enthusiasm then reverted to the grand scenery in which he had once revelled, and he craved for another sight of the Alps or the Pyrenees; he asked himself why he should not acquire the cynicism of the Bohemian, or why he should cling to the absurd vanities of wearing clean linen and looking well dressed, when it was so easy to run about the world in rags and hold out one's hand to the passers-by? He envied the lot of the vagabond who penetrates the desert, content to receive hospitality from the savage, ready to lie down and sleep beneath the starlit sky, and happy if he can but walk on and see a fresh scene every day.

In these moments of disgust and weariness, he told himself despondingly that his was a thoroughly commonplace nature, without will, energy, or conviction, incapable of the grand resolve which forces its own way; that he was a country boor who had strayed out of bounds, capable of revelling in the splendors of nature and art,

but too proud or too timid to make a desperate plunge, and a slave to public opinion.

CHAPTER III.

Humiliated by his incapacity to acquire the means of independence in the heart of civilization, Pierre had returned to the home of his childhood, glad to accept the first great duty devolving on him of consoling and sustaining his mother's declining years. His first wish was to secure her from the privations which had fallen to his own lot. It did not take much to feed and clothe the good woman, but her health was endangered by the dilapidated state of the house which she had occupied for fifty years. Pierre had it enlarged and put into repair, which swallowed up the greater part of a bag of old coins found in his father's desk.

Dolmor (for such was the name of the estate, dating perhaps from druidical times), was worth about fifty thousand francs. The income yielded by this small capital was sufficient in those days to maintain a small family in the country in tolerable comfort, allowing them to eat meat once or twice in the week, while their own establishment supplied them with eggs, vegetables, and some dairy produce. One man-servant was all that was required, if they kept a horse, for the housewife attended herself to the cooking and housework, with the assistance of the farmer's wife. A horse was an unusual luxury in those days. The farmer's brood mare took the family where they needed to go, and its keep was part of the working expenses of the farm. Nowadays

every well to do peasant keeps a horse and cart. In 1825 it was a subject of astonishment to meet a villager furnished with an umbrella, and the wife of the small proprietor went to town mounted on a pillion behind her farmer or ploughboy.

Mademoiselle Chevreuse was much better off than André, but she scandalized the neighborhood by being so bold as to ride alone on horseback, and her side-saddle was an object of curiosity as she passed along the roads. Her steed was however very unpretending, only a young mare bred in her own meadows and taught to follow her about like a dog. Her farm-bailiff had remonstrated when she declared her intention of keeping the animal for her own use. She had been obliged to pay him half its value, and this did not prevent every soul employed on the farm from lamenting over the perils which their young lady was about to incur. The mare was an ugly beast and remained lean in spite of every attention from its mistress; it was a true moorland horse, spirited but steady, prompt in action, sure-footed on bad roads, playful but never vicious, fearless and docile to the mistress to whom it was attached, but not disposed to allow any one else to mount on its back.

Marianne, in her solitary life, felt the need of intercourse, were it but for one hour in the day, with educated people. There was some connection between her family and Pierre's, and she had kept up an intimacy with old Madame André. She was in the habit of going every evening to play draughts or chat with her until her bedtime, which was nine o'clock at the latest. Then Marianne galloped home by herself in a few minutes, thanks to Suzon's quick steady paces, the mare knowing the road too well to stumble over a stone in the darkest night.

Pierre had known Marianne from her infancy. When he was a big schoolboy and came home for the holidays. Marianne was learning to toddle, and he used to carry her in his arms or on his back. Year by year he had found her grown without losing his familiarity with her, then his visits to the country had been at longer intervals and, noticing that the little neighbor's beauty was not fulfilling the promise of her childhood, he fancied her, suffering from some chronic complaint, and was kind and thoughtful for her. After this he was not seen for fully five years, and when he at length came to settle absolutely at Dolmor, his godchild was found at his old mother's side, doing her best to cheer her and help her while awaiting the return of her long looked-for son. Upon the latter's arrival, Marianne altered her habits, and no longer came every evening to amuse and look after the old lady; the days she chose for her visits were those when Pierre was absent, or when, absorbed in work of some kind, he came and asked her to keep his mother company.

This had gone on for a year without Pierre ever troubling his head much about Marianne. When he came into the country he was weighed down with two heavy burdens, disgust with the disappointments of his past life, and fear of a future which presented no gleam of hope. He could not conceal from himself that the life which had already languished in abstaining from pleasure would become still more insupportable unless he could contrive utterly to extinguish the very dream of pleasure in the future. He had determined to submit to his fate, not to fight against the impossible, to make his expectations as modest as his achievements, to try to become selfish, or, at least, a lover of ease, clinging to a secured existence, since the only boon he had in prospect was an

escape from dying of starvation in a garret, or of exhaustion in a hospital.

And yet, for the last few days, Pierre André had been suffering from a kind of fever. The task of completing his house and garden, in which he had been so long absorbed and interested, had nearly come to an end. Besides, he had received a letter, which, for some mysterious reason, had disturbed his mind.

CHAPTER IV.

The letter was from Monsieur Jean Gaucher, once a tradesman at La Faille-sur-Gouvre, but established for the last ten years in an excellent business in Paris.

"My dear Andre:

I am about to ask of you a great favor, which will probably only cost you a few words. You are aware that my son Philip, who is much more volatile and less studious than his younger brother, has devoted himself to painting, and calls himself an artist. He has some taste and talent, a good heart, little judgment, and still less prudence. Well, you know what he is and like him well enough. He ought to marry. He has been spending my money pretty freely, and is not in the way of making any yet. Will he ever make any? I begin to doubt it; but I can settle a hundred thousand francs on him, and as he is a handsome good-natured fellow, and comes of a respectable family with an unsullied

reputation, he may aspire to the hand of a young lady with two hundred thousand. Thus established, he might live without working, since that is his wish, and amuse himself with his painting, since his taste lies that way; but the lady must not expect too much, and that sort of girl is not often found in Paris. A few are still to be met with in our good old country, and I thought of that little Chevreuse, who inherits a tolerable fortune and has been brought up to a country life. I knew her parents, who were respectable people, and I saw the girl herself last year at La Faille. She is no beauty, but still not bad-looking. Your last letter spoke of her attentions to your mother, and as she is still unmarried, she may easily take a fancy to my son.

"And so, dear friend, I am sending my Philip down to you for a week. He will be with you by the 7th. He has no aversion to marriage, but would not like a plain or ill-educated woman. He will see Marianne Chevreuse at your house, and if he does not object to her, you might arrange the matter before he leaves or directly after. I rely on your old friendship, and shall be glad to assist you in return."

Why should this plain mercantile letter have irritated Pierre André so much? To begin with, he felt as if Monsieur Jean Gaucher were treating him very cavalierly. Gaucher was wealthy, and yet, in his greatest straits, Pierre had never felt sufficiently intimate to ask him for the slightest assistance. The friend of his early days might perhaps have guessed without much difficulty at Pierre's position and offered him at any rate some suitable occupation in his house of business. Gaucher was a practical man and had taken care never to let this occur to him, excusing himself by calling Pierre a highly

educated man of good position, who was sure to find some better opening.

Thus Pierre was under no obligations towards him, and thought him intrusive in foisting upon him a guest who would probably show him scant gratitude for his hospitality and make him no amends by his society for his loss of time. He knew but little of the young man, and though he called him by his Christian name from having known him when a child, took little interest in him. He had always thought his assurance outstripped his years. Beside all this, it was three or four years since he had set eyes on him, nor did he feel that he knew enough about him to recommend him as a husband to any young girl, above all, to Marianne, whom he respected for her irreproachable character, and to whom his affections were drawn through sympathy, gratitude, and the paternal feeling which clings to the title of godfather.

His first impulse was to reply as follows :

"My dear Gaucher:

You throw upon me a responsibility to which I feel quite unequal. Since I have never been able to help myself, how should I help others in such a delicate business as matrimony? Besides your plan seems to me a doubtful one. You must have forgotten that Mademoiselle Chevreuse is five-and-twenty, and will probably think Philippe too young for her, even if she has not abandoned all thoughts of parting with her liberty. To cross-examine her on such a subject would seem to me a piece of presumption unwarranted by my age—"

"You old fool," exclaimed Pierre André to himself as his pen paused; "what in the world are you writing?

Gaucher will laugh at you. He is sixty, and fancies every one else the same age.—And then it is all false! Why should you not speak to your godchild of love and marriage? She will not be vexed in the least at your troubling yourself about her happiness, and will reply, without a blush or a start, that she is ready to see the suitor in question. And then, supposing she ever heard that you had done your best to keep him at a distance,—what would she think of you?—No I must not send this letter. I will write that I am obliged to leave home, and must therefore beg the Gauchers to choose some other agent."

CHAPTER V.

Pierre Andre tore up his letter, but just as he was about to begin another, he remembered that it could not leave La Faille-sur-Gouvre before the following day, that it would be two days in getting to Paris, and would not be delivered until the very day that Philippe was to start for La Faille, possibly not before he left home. It was too late to send a refusal, M. Jean Gaucher had evidently reckoned upon his consent.

He resigned himself to the situation, and strolled to the banks of the Gouvre, in order to banish his vexation by a walk in the charming meadows watered by this limpid stream. It was there that, hidden among the willows festooned with white convolvulus and wild balsam, he saw Marianne pass, as he had often done without

experiencing any peculiar emotion. This time, however, he was disturbed by the sight of her, and instead of hailing her with a friendly greeting, plunged into the covert, and began to question himself with a touch of bitter irony.

His words were a continuation of the soliloquy with which our story opened, but the soliloquy was a written one, for Pierre enjoyed composition; he had always felt the spirit of authorship seething within him under the form of impulses which needed expression to make them complete. These secret impulses had tyrannized over his life, but not added to its pleasures, for he generally suppressed them without putting them into shape. On this occasion he imagined that he should master his agitation by setting to work to analyze it.

He was in the habit of carrying about with him a pocketbook of tolerable size, which he often made use of during his morning walk. He jotted down in it remarks on natural history, scenery, and archæology, of which he was very fond, and often enriched it with the sketch of some ruin or landscape, and as he made no effort to suppress his love of nature and art, often found that his descriptions and observations assumed somewhat of a literary form.

"I suffer from dreaminess," said Pierre to himself. "My fancies evaporate like a mist before the sun. It does me good to realize my enjoyment by expressing it. Then why not attempt now to give expression to my sufferings? For I *am* suffering, though from what I know not, and I might go on suffering a long while without finding out the cause. Let me cast away all vagueness and ignorance, and learn what it really is! If I can put it into shape, its existence is proved; if not, it is nothing and will soon pass."

So saying, Pierre had cut his pencil and opened his notebook: sitting on the grass in the shade of the willows and alders, he wrote as follows:

CHAPTER VI.

"I HAVE been suffering from weariness for the last week. My hermitage does not realize my fair dreams. I should have liked to see it covered with moss and hung with vines and clematis. Until the creepers I have planted are grown up, I shall see nothing but staring white walls, and bright new bricks. Fortunately my mothers admires it all, and looks forward to living many years in this place. Poor dear old soul! Long may she live to take pride and pleasure in it while I submit to the terrible wearisomeness which will probably mark me for its prey!

"Probably, I say, for who knows?—I have long fancied that having such a strong faculty for ambition and regret, I should have one for calmness and resignation likewise; but I have lost my balance or perhaps have never been rightly hung. Am I too old or too young? Worn out or crushed? What matter if the result be the same?

"I seem rather to have been consumed. I have been half eaten by the wild beasts, and what is left of my heart only serves to make me feel how much of it is gone. But what is the use of these complaints, these vain cries? Who will ever hear them? My mother must be kept in ignorance, then what heart can ever sympathize with my wounds?

"Marianne—Well, what of Marianne? She came into my head because she is the only person, beside my mother, with whom I am on terms of intimacy; but the distance between us is too great for her to play a part in my dreams; we differ in age, in experience and habits of thought. And yet Marianne looks thoughtful, but she says so little! Her face and manner never give any sign of expansion.

"I think she is happy. There is a surprising equanimity in her disposition. Her health which seems so fragile and used to make me so anxious, never fails her. She never suffers from heat, cold, rain, snow, long rides, or midnight vigils. She must have passed many a night by a sickbed, especially by my father's. My mother was prostrate with fatigue, but Marianne was always active and impassive. She is not very sensitive, and did not weep when she saw my mother in tears; but she was always on the spot and managed to keep up her spirits. She is certainly kind and generous, faithful and courageous.

"If I were ten years younger and a hundred thousand francs richer, I should certainly have tried to induce her to become my wife. I should not have fallen in love with her, at least I think not, but I should have esteemed her highly and trusted her implicitly, and with this I should have been satisfied.—But no, I could never be happy on such conditions. I have loved, and my love was passionate, without hope or power of expression. Love is an enthusiastic state of delirium, a dream which can exist only in an impossible and violent state of things. When its ecstasy and despair have once been realized, there is no charm or virtue in peaceful happy unions to heal the deep wounds it has left. Then why prepare un-

happiness for a fine well-disposed young creature who is incapable of these feelings?

"As to unhappiness—would Marianne ever be capable of suffering from any fluctuation in the degrees of affection?—Yes, if she were capable of loving passionately, but probably she is not. A woman's life is subject to the storms of passion and imagination between the age of fifteen and twenty-five, but Marianne has passed through this crisis without uttering a word or giving any indication of feeling. Her nature is either cold or strong; now she is safe, she has doubled the stormy headland, she is petrified, her tastes and habits are formed; such are the doubtful benefits of a country life like that we are leading, a calm stupor and happiness which I myself long to attain without any immediate hope of it.

"Must I then suffer thus another ten long years without a hope of growing colder? Shall I ask Marianne to teach me the secret of her success? She would not understand me, or would fail to give an answer; she would think it absurd of me not to understand her, and I *am* absurd, for I don't understand her in the least. Few men, in fact, know or understand women. Those who fascinate and refuse us remain a mystery. Those on whom we can make an impression lose their charm, and, where our senses are intoxicated, we care little to trace the workings of the soul. In this respect, marriage is a tomb. I rejoice in being too old and poor to be caught in the trap.

"It just occurs to me that I have not been inspired with one thought of the least value during the quarter of an hour I have been writing this. I have read it over and cannot understand myself, or find the secret spring of my foolish curiosity about Marianne. I am troubled and anxious; Marianne is serenity itself. What right

has she to flit by like a reproach and sarcasm without divining my presence or conceiving my unhappiness? She is certainly not armed, as I ought to be, with philosophy and experienee; she is a child by comparison, no struggle has tested her strength, no deception clouded her spirit.

"Well, that is the real cause of her strength. She has lost none of her powers, she has not fallen a prey to the lions and vultures; she is intact and her life complete; feeble as the flame within may be, it suffices her, and what I have left serves but to consume me."

CHAPTER VII.

Pierre closed his book and replaced it in his pocket. He stood still for some moments, watching the dragonflies as they chased each other over the rippling stream. He noticed the affinity existing between the wings of these handsome insects and the iridescent tints of the running water. Then he discovered a relation between the play of the wavelets and the graceful wheeling of the insects' flight. He took out his book again, and wrote in it some rather pretty verses, calling the dragonflies "daughters of the stream," and "spirits of the flowers;" then he shrugged his shoulders, scratched out the lines, and strolled towards Dolmor, feeling that his walk had been devoid of pleasure or profit, but also of fatigue or constraint. It was certainly far preferable to the long rounds he had often been obliged to make on some uninteresting errand through the heat and dust of Paris. In those days,

which were not yet far distant, how often had he mentally ejaculated as he entered some dusty chambers or gloomy counting-house: "Good heavens! give me a tree on the banks of the Gouvre, and leisure to watch the flow of its clear waters. I ask but little, and that little is denied me!" "I am an ungrateful fellow," said he, as he walked along. "Here I have my wish gratified, and yet I am not happy."

He reached the turn by the rocks, and hurried on with his eyes bent on the ground, watching a fly or a blade of grass and telling himself that everywhere, on these pretty sandy paths bordered with purple heather and spikes of broom, he might evolve a poem or find a drama, whereas, on the pavements of large cities, nothing met his eye but mud and dirt. Then his thoughts fled to the Alps, and he pictured to himself the snow sparkling in the sunlight, and the icy blue pinnacles standing out clear against a rose-tinted sky,—when suddenly, as he fancied himself arrived at the door of his own cottage, he discovered his mistake. At the bend by the rocks he had taken the wrong turn, and it had brought him to the gate of Validat, Marianne's demesne.

Validat was a well-ordered farm for that district and that epoch, but the manure-heap lay surrounded by an undrained pool, and the farmer's health was invaded by the denizens of the poultry-yard. It was the season when the cattle had ended their works in the fields, and were not yet turned out to pasture. The hay crops were not yet gathered; and the poor animals were constrained to take exercise in the yard, which had been closed by a hurdle. The only fastening to these hurdles is a circlet of twigs, interwoven and passed between the first two rails, so as to hang on a nail from a ploughshare, driven into the bark of the old tree which does duty as a stake. On raising this

circlet, the long heavy hurdle swings back on its hinges, which are fastened to some other tree or stump. The fence is a bank surmounted by a quick set hedge, or a hedge of dried thorns, cut and stuck evenly into the beaten soil The one surrounding Validat was old and very pretty, formed of plants which had grown up by chance in the rich soil, black thorn and white thorn, elders, flowering brambles, hazels and oak saplings, spreading out on either hand a long branch to interlace with the adjacent stakes, while the wild hop and briony festooned the whole. The banks were covered with velvety moss, and the little ditch was green with watercress, veronica. and arrowheads

Pierre, finding that he had lost his way, aud saying to himself that it was useless to disturb Marianne when he had nothing of importance to tell her, did not lift the circlet of twigs which served as the padlock to her gate but retraced his steps, vexed at having been so absent-minded.

The young lady's sitting-room, however, had certainly a back door which opened on the farmyard, but it faced the contrary way and looked out on the garden, which lay to the south. The master's dwelling consisting of only one story, generally looks upon the farmyard, the manure heap, the laborers at their work, and the cattle all which he loves to keep under constant surveillance.

Marianne had altered this arrangement and blocked up the windows, merely reserving a door as a medium of prompt communication with her servants. She had thrown out a new window and opened a glass door on the opposite side of the building. The dark wall of the house on that side was enlivened by a large yellow jessamine, a scented clematis which twined into countless festoons, and tall hollyhocks of every color. She had had the

ground levelled for a width of fifteen feet, and a roof of tiles protected this species of veranda, enclosed by flowers and shrubs. from the damp, while a shady walk led down from the centre of it to the bottom of the garden. The garden was not large, though pretty and differed little from that of any well-to-do peasant in the district; there were a few plots of vegetables, bordered with pinks and roses, and edged with thyme and lavender; in one corner grew the old box-tree to furnish branches for Palm Sunday; beyond this the fine turf of the orchard was thickly shaded by trees, and the whole was surrounded by the usual vine-covered arbor, enclosed by a hedge resembling that round the farm-yard and a fence made up with dry thorns.

In this quiet garden Marianne Chevreuse sat with her book or sewing when not engaged in household work. She was just walking under the vine-clad arbor as Pierre André passed along the road beneath on his way back to his own house. Their eyes met with surprise on both sides, and they exchanged greetings in some embarrassment. Pierre, only half conscious of being ill at ease himself, could not understand why Marianne should be so, and supposed the awkwardness of his salutation must have infected her.

CHAPTER VIII.

MARIANNE asked André after his mother. "She is quite well," replied, he "only longing for a sight of you. Do you know how rare your visits have become? We have seen nothing of our little neighbor for the last week."

"You have not been away for a week, have you?"

"I have not been away at all. My journeys about my garden and building have come to an end. It is all done now, and I hope to stay with my mother and give her my company. Is that any reason why you should deprive us of yours?"

"It would be no great loss to you; but if Madame Andre misses me, I am ready to come whenever she sends for me."

"You *must* come child! My poor mother does not find it easy to get beyond her garden. She can scarcely come to see you, but if you desert her she will miss you."

"I have no thoughts of deserting her, but I fancied she preferred your society to mine, and that if I come too often, I might be in your way."

"In our way? What an absurd idea, when you are one of us!" As Marianne made no reply, André suddenly plunged, without intending into what lay on his mind. "Yes, Marianne," he went on to say, "you have become rather strange of late, and I can't quite make you out. May I speak freely? Have you time to listen and answer?"

"Yes, I am listening to you."

"It is not very convenient to have to raise my voice and talk to you through the hedge. May I come in?"

"If you will go on to the fence, I will join you."

Marianne ran forward and arrived first. She adroitly removed the bundle of thorns without pricking herself, clambered over the fence and alighted on the little green pathway, where André found her ready to listen to him. "You seem to allow no intruders in your garden?" said he. "I thought you would have invited me in."

"My garden is an ugly one, and yet I am fond of it.

But you, with your good taste, would laugh at it, and then I should feel annoyed—"

"Did I not say what a strange creature you were?"

"I did not know I was; you never made the remark before in my hearing."

"To begin with, why have you ceased to address me familiarly since I came home for good? Does my advanced age inspire you with such respect."

"No, for you are not old, nor am I very young now,"

"Then how is it? Why do you never give a direct answer to a direct question?"

Marianne seemed surprised, and looking close at André, said: "Are you in a bad humor to-day?"

He was struck with her glance, which was proud and scrutinizing. It was the first time he had seen such a look on her face. "You are quite right, I am in a bad humor," replied he. "I have an embarrassing communication to make, and you give me no assistance."

"Embarrassing?" said Marianne, looking at him again in some anxiety. "What embarrassment can there be between *us?*"

"You shall hear. Let us walk on, it is too cool to stand in the shade after getting heated. Will you take my arm!" Marianne put her hand within André's arm without a word, and waited for him to speak.

"Well," said he abruptly as he resumed his walk, "I will tell you about it. Some one has applied to me for an introduction to you, and I did not think it right to give it without your sanction, as I was anxious you should not be taken by surprise."

"I am much obliged to you, for I dislike surprises. This has probably reference to an offer of marriage?"

"Just so."

"You know that I have refused several already?"

"So my mother tells me. She thinks you have made up your mind to remain single, is that the case?"

"No, she is mistaken. It was only that I objected to the suitors who came forward."

"Did you dislike them?"

"No; but I did not care for them."

"Do you think it necessary to be in love with the man you marry?"

"Naturally I do. The one you propose——"

"I propose no one, I am a mere agent."

'And care little whether he suits me or not?"

"You will have no difficulty in sending me about my business, but you cannot give an answer at present, for the person in question is merely known to you by name."

"Then my answer is ready. I have no objection to see him, unless you tell me beforehand that he is sure not to suit me."

"Would you take my word for it?"

"Why surely you would not deceive me!"

"Certainly not! Well then, the young man has one fault, that of being too young."

"Is he younger than myself?"

"Yes."

"And what else?"

"What else, and what then?—You are summary in your views, you pass over the main objection."

"I did not say that I thought it unimportant. But I should like to know all."

"He is poorer than yourself at present, but likely to be richer some day."

"And what else?"

"What else? Nothing, so far as I know. I know him by sight, but barely more. I have hardly ever talked to him."

"What does he look like?"

"He is rather good-looking; tall and well made, indeed a fine-looking fellow."

"And what sort of expression has he?"

"Well, a self-satisfied expression, if I must tell the truth."

"You don't say a word about the family?"

"They are highly respectable people, and you can obtain full information about them. They belong to our part of the country and only left it ten years ago."

"Why, you must be speaking of one of Gaucher's sons?"

"I had not intended to mention his name until you consented to be introduced; but since you have made such a good guess—"

"I don't quite remember—" said Marianne thoughtfully; "there are two or three of them."

"Only two. The younger is the aspirant to your hand."

"He aspires—I have some confused recollection of him. He was a child and cannot remember me. It must be my little property that he covets—"

"The aspirations are scarcely his, but his father's—Stay, here is the letter; since you know all, you may read it."

Marianne stood still and read old Gaucher's epistle with her usual composure. André watched her face, which wore a faint smile at two or three passages in which the tradesman put the matrimonial question in a plain commercial light; but she was neither astonished nor vexed, and handed the letter back saying: "Well, let him come, and we shall see!"

CHAPTER IX.

Pierre felt strangely scornful and resumed his usual tone of raillery as he said: "I see that my mother was completely mistaken. You have not the slightest inclination for a single life, have you?"

"I must marry now or never," replied Marianne. "If I wait, I shall never make up my mind."

"Why not?"

"Because liberty is such a sweet and precious gift. If we have it too long, it is hard to give up."

"I agree with you there. You had better marry at once, while you have the inclination. Then I may calmly await M. Phillippe Gaucher's arrival without dreading that he will be badly received. He will be with us by Sunday morning: come and dine with us that day."

"I would rather not, the first advances should not be on my side. You and Madame Andre had better come and dine with me."

"You know that she cannot walk much, and would never manage to get home at night."

"I have set up a chaise, and my bailiff's big mare shall draw it. Your mother has long promised to come and dine with me as soon as I had a carriage."

"And then you will throw open the sanctuary which you refused to let me enter to-day?"

"Ah, Madame André will be there then!"

"Then you consider me a stranger like the rest of the world? How droll you are!"

"Not droll at all. In my parent's lifetime it was

quite natural for you to come about the place, but during the five years you have been away, I have become an orphan and been forced to live circumspectly, if I would keep my character. You know how inquisitive and tattling our neighbors are. In spite of our living in the heart of a quiet country like ours, I could not receive more than one visit from any man without becoming the subject of remarks."

"But I am so old, and your godfather, occupying almost the position of a father to you!"

"That makes no difference. I know the country, but you have forgotten what it is like."

"Well, I ought to wish you to get married, that I might have the pleasure of seeing you more frequently."

"I did not think it was so great a pleasure to you."

"Or you would not have deprived me of it so often?"

"You have voluntarily deprived yourself of it more than once."

"I have certainly often taken advantage of your being with my mother to finish some work in my own room. It was not very polite, I own, but I thought you would hardly notice it."

"I was glad to see that you gave me credit for sufficent attachment not to stand on ceremony with me."

"Glad! I would rather have had you vexed, or at least sorry."

"What do you mean?" said Marianne, standing still and questioning André carelessly with a glance from her dark eyes. The predominating expression on her countenance was that of expectation, awaiting an explanation to save herself the trouble of thinking.

"I seem to have made a stupid speech, for I don't know how to explain it," said Pierre to himself. There was but one course open, that of cutting short the con-

versation. "I don't mean to inflict a long walk on you," said he, releasing Marianne's arm. "I forget that the nearer we are to my house, the further we are from yours. Now that we have arranged it all, I have nothing more to ask. I shall bring your lover to see you on Sunday."

"I have no lover as yet," returned Marianne coldly; "and as to Sunday, your mother must consent to make one of the party, otherwise it is quite impracticable. I will come and ask her this evening, if you have no objection."

"I have not the slightest objection," replied André rather drily, feeling really fretted and indignant at her ceremonious manner. "Good-by till then!" And he turned away dissatisfied, almost vexed.

"What a cold nature hers is!" said he, as he walked along at a quick, uneven pace. "She is narrow-minded, self-conscious, icy, anxious about the world's opinion, a prude, in fact. What could I be thinking of when I tortured myself just now to sound the depths of this calm lake? It has no depths; it is not a lake, but a pond full of reeds and frogs. See what we grow into with living in the country! The child was pretty and looked interesting, owing to her pensive delicate expression of face; now she has grown up into a strong girl, strong in her prudent calculations and devoid of feeling."

CHAPTER X.

"And what does all this signify to me?" said Pierre to himself, as he drew near his own house. "My cottage is very pretty! I was wrong to talk against it this mon-

ing. The walls may be too white, but they turn quite pink in the glow of the evening sun. My creepers are making fine shoots and will reach the balcony towards the end of the autumn. It is a real pleasure to have a home of one's own, and enjoy perfect liberty. Why should I blame my quiet godchild for thinking of herself when my own aspirations for life in the future are confined to the pleasure of breathing?"

"Come in at once, child!" cried Madame Andre, from the dining-room. "It is half-past five, and your soup is growing cold."

"And I am keeping you waiting?" returned Pierre, as he unburthened himself of his satchel, which was filled with stones and flowers. "I had no idea that it was so late!" He sat down to table as soon as he had washed his hands at the little blue porcelain cistern in the dining-room, and feeling obliged to prepare his mother for Marianne's visit, gave a full account of the affair before they dined.

Madame André listened quietly till he mentioned Marianne's readiness to comply with his request for the interview. At this point she became incredulous. "You are either romancing, or Marianne was making fun of you," said she. "Marianne does not intend to marry, she has told me so again and again."

"Well, she has either forgotten it, for she avers the contrary, or else she has changed her mind. Fickle as her sex! But what is the matter, dear mother? Are you crying?"

"I may be, I don't know?" replied the good lady, wiping away with her napkin two large tears which had rolled unconsciously down her cheeks. "My heart is full, and it would not take much to make me cry."

"Then let us talk of something else. I don't want to

spoil your appetite. You are very fond of Marianne, I know, mother, and she seems worthy of your affection, but she is not so totally different from the rest of the world as you may think her. She has longed for love and family ties like other girls; you do not surely expect her to give this up for the pleasure of playing draughts and picking up your knitting stitches to the end of the chapter? She has some thought for herself like all of us, and is not to be blamed for it."

"And you think it is selfishness that makes me vexed with her determination? After all, perhaps you are right. I own my fault, and will not wear a sad face. Let her come, and she shall find me as calm as yourself, and in just as good spirits."

"As mine?" said André, surprised at his mother's steady gaze; "why should I be disturbed?"

"I thought you might have been rather troubled.

"You never thought, I hope, of my falling in love with Marianne?"

"If you had done so, I should have seen no objection."

"Do you really mean that? Come, confess, now, dear mother, you wanted me to be married to your little pet! How was it you never told me a word about it?"

"I told you many a word, but you would never listen to me."

"When was that? For I declare I have not the faintest recollection of it."

"A long while ago, six years now. It was the last time you came to see us before your poor father died, you had a little money then, and we wanted you to marry that we might keep you in the country. Marianne was just twenty, not an orphan, and rich and independent as she is now. The marriage might have been possible then."

"More than it is now," rejoined, Pierre, with the live-

liest emotion. "I am older and poorer than I was, and should be no match for her. Pray, dear mother, never expose me to the humiliation of being refused by such a cautious and disdainful person; never mention me to her. I hope you never have done?"

"Yes, occasionally."

"And what did she say?"

"Nothing. Marianne never makes any reply when her reply might implicate her."

"Quite true, it is what I have noticed. Her prudence is perfectly horrible to me. I can understand a woman of the world who is ready to make advances, a coquette, and deceiver,—her motives are evident, she wishes to surround herself with adorers; but a country girl who looks for a disinterested husband, and is so different in her ways, seems to me an iceberg which nothing can melt."

"Hush, here she comes," said Madame André, who had noticed her son's air of chagrin. "Don't let us look as if we were sitting in judgment upon her."

CHAPTER XI.

Having finished dinner, they went out to meet Marianne, who galloped quietly up on Suzon, and jumped down from her saddle almost without drawing rein. The docile animal seemed to divine her intentions and stopped short, then walked slowly behind her till they reached the cottage, where she turned to the left, going by herself to her accustomed quarters, a familiar corner of the barn which she shared with the ass kept on the farm.

Marianne's riding costume consisted merely of a white cambric bodice, a chip hat, and a long striped blue and gray skirt, which her deft fingers caught up gracefully in a minute, by means of a leather belt. Her hair was cropped short, and curled like a child's which, added to her short and slender figure, made her look like a girl of fourteen or fifteen. Her complexion was a dead white, slightly tinted round the eye and on the neck, but neither tanned nor freckled. She had delicate features and splendid teeth, and might have been pretty, had she ever thought of her charms, or believed in them.

"Well," said Madame André as she kissed her, "we know what brings you here, darling. You have made up your mind to be married."

"Not so, Madame André," returned Marianne, "my mind is not made up yet."

"Oh yes, for you have a wish to see your suitor, which shows that you mean to accept him, if he takes your fancy."

"That's a question. It will do no harm to look, as they tell us in the shops. Will you promise to bring him up on Sunday?"

"I will, darling, for I can refuse you nothing."

"I will leave you to discuss this weighty matter," said Pierre André, turning away towards the fields. "Women always have their little secrets on these interesting occasions, and I shall be quite in the way."

"Not at all," replied Marianne. "I have no confidences to make, and do not intend to feel much interest until I hear from your mother and yourself what I ought to think of the person in question."

"What! you would wait to hear our opinion before deciding?"

"Certainly."

"I could not undertake so grave a responsibility," resumed André drily: "I know nothing about husbands, and think you must be laughing at us if you pretend to know nothing about them either."

"And how should I know anything about them?" said Marianne, opening her eyes with amazement.

"You must surely know why you have refused all your former offers. So you must have an idea of what you want, and what would make you accept this new suitor."

"Or any other!" ejaculated Marianne with a faint smile. "Don't go away, I want to ask you something."

"Really? Probably you want to know what sort of husband would suit you?" They all sat down on a bench, Madame Andre between the two others.

"No," returned Marianne, "you don't know, for you have never considered the subject, or else you would never give me a serious answer, for you don't take much interest in my prospects. The question I wanted to put is but remotely connected with marriage. I wanted to know whether a girl in my position could educate herself without changing her home or mode of life."

"What a singular question!" said Pierre, turning to his mother; "do you understand what she is driving at?"

"Yes, indeed I do," replied Madame André, "nor is it the first time that Marianne has troubled herself with such ideas. I have no answer to give. I learnt all that was taught me as a child, and it was enough for my station in this country place, but I don't know much, and there are many things I can never talk of, for I don't understand them in the least. The only course open to a woman so placed, is to ask no questions, lest she should expose her ignorance. Marianne is not satisfied with

having tact and knowing all that is necessary in domestic life, she would like to be able to converse with well-educated people on any subject."

"Excuse me, Madame Andrè," put in Marianne, "but I wish for information on my own account, rather than on that of others. I see, for instance, how happy my godfather is in walking about by himself all the day long thinking over all he knows, and I should like to know whether he is happier than myself, who walk about, knowing nothing, and thinking of nothing."

"There," cried André in surprise. "you are touching a spring which I could never find when I tried to discover the secret pleasures of reverie!"

"What, have you ever tried to find out whether there was anything in my brain?"

"I had not the slightest thought of applying my remark especially to you, dear child; but I have asked myself a thousand times the question you ask now. Often, when watching the deep look of contemplation worn by some peasants, the exuberant joy of some children, the apparently ecstatic rapture of singing birds, or the exquisite repose of flowers in the moonlight, I have asked myself whether the knowledge of nature is a benefit, or whether reflection does not rob reverie of its greatest charm, and sensation of its greatest power. Forgive me for talking like a pedant, I must seem to be using ridiculous expressions. To resume, I must own that I have never found an answer to my question, and you might do much to throw light on the subject, if you would take the trouble to converse occasionally on other subjects than washing at home, or the market price of poultry."

"I can only talk about what I understand, and can't find words to express what I think. I should have to take time and consider. Wait a moment, and I will try!"

CHAPTER XII.

The two remained silent for several moments. Marianne appeared to be engaged on some difficult sum in mental arithmetic. Madame Andrê showed no surprise at her feeble powers. Pierre alone was a prey to mental agitation. He had apparently taken the solution of the problem he had that morning propounded, as to whether Marianne's faculties were dormant or non-existent, much to heart.

At length she broke the silence rather impatiently. "No, I can't explain myself," said she. "I must do it some other time. Besides, I did not come to ask you whether education made people happy or unhappy; all that I wanted to know was whether I could educate myself without leaving home."

"You may educate yourself anywhere," replied Pierre, "if you have books, and you have the means of of procuring them."

"But then I must know what books, and I reckoned upon your telling me this."

"That will be easy enough, as soon as I learn what you know and what you don't know. Your father was an educated man, and had some standard works. He often told me that you were idle and averse to study. Seeing that you were delicate, he did not make any point of diverting you from the rural occupations for which you showed such a decided preference."

"As I have always done," replied Marianne. "So

long as I am in the open air, and moving about while I think, I am all right. But if I sit down and reflect, I feel as if I should die."

"Then you must remain as you are, my child, and continue to lead the same sort of life. I don't see why you should seek for fresh occupations when marriage will provide you with so many of importance."

"*If* I marry!" pursued Marianne. "But if I do not, I must provide myself with occupation against the time when I am no longer able to be always out of doors. But the sun has set now; would you like your game, Madame Andrè?"

Madame André accepted the offer, and Pierre, who was irritated by every kind of game, remained in the garden, walking on the terrace and looking at Marianne as she played draughts with his mother in the drawing-room; the small lamp with its green shade cast a faint light upon her, showing her as attentive to the game, as unconscious and impassive as ever.

"Who knows," said Pierre to himself, "whether her faculties may not have been blunted by her peculiar nervous condition? Many talented young people come to nothing, for lack of the physical vigor necessary for intellectual exertion. No one pays attention to these things in women, they choose some other course, and other results follow. It is but rarely that they are required to create for themselves any position demanding great mental effort, or constant assiduity in study. How is it that Marianne torments herself about becoming an exception? Would she experience, like me, the secret chagrin of never making a proper use of her gifts? This is not a feminine ailment. A woman's life has other aims. It is fame and happiness enough for her to be a wife and mother."

When nine o'clock arrived, Marianne kissed Madame André, gave her hand to her godfather, and vaulted lightly upon Suzon, who had been taught to stretch out all her legs so as to make her back lower. The rider and her steed were both so light, that the sound of the horse's hoofs were scarcely heard on the sand, and soon became lost in the stillness of the night. The air was warm and laden with odors. Pierre stood for some time motionless by the garden-fence, following Marianne in imagination, crossing the little beech grove and balmy heath, and the clear stream strewn with blocks of dark stone. He fancied himself gazing on nature with her eyes, and amused himself with attributing to her secret emotions, which had possibly no existence.

The following day was a Saturday, market-day at La Faille. Every one who lives in the country, be he peasant or proprietor, goes to market, even when he has nothing to buy or sell. It is a place of gathering where they are sure to meet any one from the neighborhood that they may be wanting to see. There, too, news is exchanged, and the rate of provisions fixed. Pierre went in order to read the papers; once a week he learned what was going on in the world, and considered this enough for a man who wished to keep aloof from active life.

Passing in front of the hotel—the "Chêne-Verte"—just as the chaise drove up which came to meet the country diligences, he saw a fine young man alight, and rush up to him, crying, "Here I am!" as he embraced him with cordial familiarity. This fine young man, who looked as strong as Hercules, and as fresh as a rose, and dressed in the latest fashion in an elegant travelling costume, was Philippe Gaucher, arrived a day before his time. "Yes, my dear fellow," repeated he, thinking from André's air

of stupefaction that he failed to recognize him, "Here I am, Philippe—"

Pierre interrupted him. "I know perfectly well who you are," said he, lowering his voice, "but it is of no use proclaiming your name on the house-tops; the business that brings you here will never be accomplished without prudence. You must learn, my young Parisian, that the first element of failure in the country is to reveal your plans. Come, and I will take you home without going through the town. We will turn down this half rural lane, and be there in the time for dinner in less than an hour."

"Nearly an hour's walk with my portmanteau in my hand?" said Philippe, astonished at the proposition.

"Is it heavy," asked Pierre, lifting it; "no, it is no weight at all."

"But I have other luggage. I have brought all my painting paraphernalia, for I mean to make some sketches."

"Then I will go to the hotel, and order a man to bring it all up to my house; I have no sort of conveyance to offer you; my legs serve me, and I am all the better for the exercise."

"And I, as a landscape painter, know how to use mine and I can carry a well-furnished sketching apparatus on my back. You shall see me do it to-morrow, but for the present I prefer the man and the barrow."

"Wait for me here," said Pierre. He went inside to give the necessary orders, and within five minutes rejoined his guest, and off they started.

Philippe's first words startled André somewhat. "Have you many good-looking women in the neighborhood?" asked he.

"Open your eyes and you will see," replied Pierre, laughing.

"I always keep them open," returned the young artist, "it is a part of my profession, and I have just seen a droll little creature pass by on horseback, the horse trotting like a mouse."

"Unattended?" said André, rather excited.

"Quite unattended—on a little iron-gray horse, with black mane and tail."

Pierre professed not to know who it could be, though he felt secretly convinced as to the identity

"And you say that she is pretty?"

"I don't say so, lest I should be mistaken, for she passed so quickly;—but she looked perfectly charming."

"She is not considered pretty, and has no pretensions to beauty."

"Then you know who she is?"

"I think I do. You say she is little?"

"And as slender as a spindle, but very graceful; her hair is very dark and curly, she looks pale and interesting, and has fine large eyes."

"In short, you admire her?"

"So far I do. But what, it can never be—?"

"Yes, but it is—the very young person whom your father wishes you to marry."

"Mademoiselle Chevreuse? Only fancy! And I chance upon her at once? Does she know why I am coming?"

"She knows nothing," said Pierre curtly, "nor did I expect you till to-morrow morning."

"Just so. I set out a day sooner in order not to travel through the country by night. An artist wants to see everything! And then I wished to form some idea of my native country, for I was born at La Faille, like yourself, my dear fellow, but I have lost all recollection of those early days. As to the town, it is hideous so far

as I have seen it, but the surrounding country is pretty, and here we have a pleasant green lane before us, and a blue sky at the end of the vista—this is charming. One gets accustomed to these big spreading walnut trees, and your mutilated pollard elms frame an amusing contrast. I could be happy enough here, and shall have no objection to spend the summer in this country, if my wife wishes it."

"Who do you mean by your wife?" said André, casting a glance of haughty irritation at the young artist in spite of himself.

"Well, Mademoiselle Chevreuse, or some one else, answered Philippe, quite undisturbed. "Here you see me, come down into this country with injunctions from my father to find a wife, and promise of a settled income, if I obey. I am tired of living with him, he is a good enough sort of man, you know, but I find him rather a bore. We have not the same tastes. He will leave off worrying and quarrelling with my artistic tendencies as soon as I double my income by marrying. So, here goes for marriage, since marrying and painting are one and the same in his eyes!"

"And for the sake of the art you love, would you love the woman, whoever she might be?"

"No, but I would be indulgent and not require her to be a model of wit or beauty. As to temper, she must have a very bad one if she could not get on with me. I am the best natured fellow in the world, always in good spirits, fond of light and liberty, and ready to laugh at anything—but stay, here is the same lady on horseback before us. Is it not Mademoiselle Chevreuse? Let us quicken our pace that I may take a good look at her."

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CHAPTER XIII.

Marianne had indeed stopped, or rather slackened Suzon's pace to a walk, in order to speak to Marichette, the farmer's wife, whom she had overtaken not far from Dolmor.

Marichette was seated on some sacks of hay in the hind part of a long cart drawn by oxen, while her husband walked by its side, urging them on with a goad. The lane was too narrow to allow a horse, or even a foot-passenger, to go between the wheel and the hedge. The oxen went slowly, Suzon sniffed the hay which had been brought for her, and knowing whom she had to deal with, had thrust in her nose till it touched the woman's knees; the latter stroked the animal's forehead as she gave her mistress an account of the fat sheep she had sold, and the pigs she had priced, which were all too dear if they were worth anything.

During the course of this dialogue, Marianne left Suzon to her own devices, and, throwing the bridle over her arm, assumed the careless attitude of fatigue or meditation. Catching sight of a beautiful spray of honeysuckle in the thicket, she suddenly urged Suzon forward with a touch of her heel instead of pulling the bridle, and stretched out both arms to gather the spray.

But at this juncture, Philippe, who, leaving Andre a little behind, had come up unobserved, darted towards the honeysuckle, broke off the spray, and presented it to Marianne with the bold easy courtesy of a Parisian.

On seeing this handsome stranger, with his ardent gaze and promising smile, Marianne did not fail to recog

nize her intending suitor. No one in her own neighborhood would have showed such ready gallantry. She blushed slightly, but recovered her composure promptly, and said with a faint smile, not accepting the proffered spray: "Thank you, sir, but I was not wanting it for myself; it was for my horse, who likes to eat it."

"Well," returned the artist readily, "then I will offer it to your horse, who is sure not to decline it." So saying, he held out the honeysuckle to Suzon, who munched it without the slightest ceremony.

Philippe made his finest bow, raising his hat very high, and holding it above his head, as if he were hailing a sovereign or some popular character. Marianne had gathered up the reins, and bowing slightly without looking at Philippe, she urged Suzon into the ditch, which took her up to the knees, and thus skilfully avoiding the huge cart wheels and the long horns of the oxen vanished at a gallop round the corner.

Pierre was pleased with Marianne's well managed exit. The slightest accident would have made Philippe master of the situation. "Well," said he to the artist, disguising a sarcastic laugh, "have you had a good view of her?"

"She is charming," replied Philippe, "so lady-like, besides being witty and self-possessed, in fact, quite the coquette. She is the very picture of a woman. But what can be her age? My father called her older than I am, he must have been jesting, she looks like a schoolgirl."

"She is five and twenty."

"Impossible!"

"I can swear to it. She has no wish to conceal her age."

"Well, it is all the same to me, people are never

older than they look. I, who am already as bearded as a Turk, might pass for as much more than my age as she might for less than hers; we might be painted together as some classical subject, 'Strength and Grace,' or something of that sort."

"Then you have made up your mind?"

"Oh yes. I am quite in love with her."

"And you have no doubts as to your success?"

"Not the least."

"You are fortunate in possessing so much self-confidence."

"My dear André, my confidence rests on two things, my youth and my love. These are two grand powers; love is felt and communicated, and youth inspires us with nerve to dare and give vent to our feelings. There is no vanity in calling oneself young or in love."

"You are right," replied Pierre, looking sad and dejected. "Vanity is only ridiculous in those who have lost the freshness of inexperience and the ingenuity of first impulses."

They had reached a part where the road widened, allowing them to pass the cart, and were drawing near Pierre André's cottage. Further on along the road, which began to ascend, they saw Marianne, who had again slackened her pace.

"She is not galloping now," said Philippe. "Who knows if she is not thinking of me?"

"She must be," said Pierre to himself, and he felt a sort of inward spasm.

CHAPTER XIV.

Philippe Gaucher was so unfortunate as to find no favor in Madame André's eyes. Yet he was a well-meaning young fellow, frank, simple, and as open as the day; but Madame André objected to any man who took upon himself to look handsomer than her son, though the latter was not what country folk call a *fine* man. His shoulders were not square, his beard black, his color high, nor his chest arched. He looked interesting, modest, and intelligent; and both his face and person were cast in a refined mould.

His mother, who had seen nothing of the world, and could have given no definition of her ideas of refinement, possessed in him a certain standard of comparison. She was shocked by the air of vulgarity penetrating all Philippe's words, gestures, and attitudes, and concluded that his ideas and actions were natural to a man of his type. She was not deficient in that mother wit which belongs to the centre of France, and especially to its women. She rallied him politely all dinner time, without his condescending to notice it; but then, as she was hospitable before all things, she had received him kindly and shown him every possible attention.

When Philippe learned that the Andrés were to dine with Mademoiselle Chevreuse on the day following, and would take the opportunity of introducing him, he thought more progress was made than he anticipated, and could not help saying that his lucky star was in the ascendant.

"Which is it?" asked Madame André maliciously.

"I don't know its name," answered he lightly; "I know nothing of astronomy, but when I see the largest and brightest, I feel sure it must be mine. Don't you believe in the influence of the stars, Pierre?"

"To be sure, I believe in them for Napoleon and for you. If simple mortals like myself are patronized by a star, mine must be tiny and very far away, for I have never seen it yet."

Philippe had prolonged the evening to an unusual hour at Dolmor, never suspecting that nine was the old lady's bedtime. Pierre, seeing the finger of the clock point to eleven, said to his guest: "You must be tired with your journey; you have only to say the word, and I will show you to your room."

"I am never tired," returned Gaucher; "nothing fatigues me, but I still hear the rumbling of that diligence in my head, which makes me rather sleepy; so, if you will allow me—"

Pierre conducted him to a little guest-chamber, quite new and fresh, where the artist threw back the shutters, in order, as he said, to be aroused by the first rays of dawn. He thought of going out and exploring the country, in order to select some subject for painting during the days following.

"I hope you will sleep well," said Pierre; "I wake with the dawn, and will call you, if you would like to be shown the prettiest spots in our valley."

"Thank you," said Philippe, "but I must own that I prefer finding them out for myself. It is a trouble to an artist to have to balance his own points of view against those of others."

"Which means," thought Pierre André, "that you intend to track Marianne home and importune her by your curiosity. I shall keep an eye on you, my boy; she

is not yet yours, and her godfather has a right to protect her."

He returned to his room, and thought of writing to work off his ill-humor, but could not find the pocket-book in which he had been scribbling the day before. His searches after it were fruitless, and as he scarcely recollected what he had written, he began to fear lest he might have lost it during his walk. Remembering that he had put down his stick and satchel in the drawing-room on his return, he went down to see if the book were there, and came upon his mother, who seemed just as much agitated as himself.

"What are you looking for?" said she.

"For a wretched little book, in which I made my notes."

"Here it is," said she, opening a drawer. "I found it this morning when I was clearing things away, and locked it up here."

"If you have read it you will think me demented," replied André, as he pocketed his book.

"Read it? Dear me, no; I never trouble myself to read writing, and don't find it over-easy to make out; but why do you say you must seem demented?"

"Because—First tell me why you seem so disturbed and put out."

"Oh, *I* have no difficulty in answering. It makes me furious to think of the sweetheart we have to present to Marianne, and how we shall be forced to pretend before her that we think him charming, now that we have received and welcomed him. But no, I can never act such a part. I consider him absurd and wearisome, and will not promise to disguise my opinion."

"You are judging rashly," replied Pierre, seating himself beside his mother, who had flung herself on the sofa

in a pet. "He is neither foolish nor bad-hearted; his manner is rather self-confident, I own, but it may suit Marianne, who knows? She may not have all the judgment with which you, and I, for your sake, credit her."

"Marianne has plenty of cleverness and good sense too," exclaimed Madame Andre; "you do not know her."

"Quite true; she is a mystery to me."

"It is your own fault; you talk to her so little and make such light use of every opportunity of knowing more of her!"

"It may be partly my fault, but still more hers. I assure you that she likes to play the sphinx, and that I lack Philippe Gaucher's boldness, and cannot lift the veil of modesty in which a young girl shrouds herself. She may be a child compared to me, but still she is a woman, and I cannot encroach upon feminine reserve."

CHAPTER XV.

Madame Andre reflected for some moments, then taking her son's hand, she said: "You are timid, too timid! If you had chosen, *you* might have been the man whom Marianne would have loved and married."

"You are raking up bygone offences! That was six years ago. Remember that I have given up all thoughts of marriage for the last six years."

"And why? Are you so old at thirty-five?"

"Sufficiently so to judge of my future by comparing it with the past. When a man has not succeeded in making a fortune before the age of five and thirty, it is

safe to prophesy that he will never do it, and may withdraw from the perplexities and emotions of life.

"All the more reason that he should marry well."

"To seek for love with an eye to marrying well, is what I have never done, and never shall do."

"Yes, yes, I understand, I know you. I have some pride myself and can enter into yours, but I am blaming you for not having loved Marianne for her own sake; she deserved it, and would have been ready to return your affection. When love comes on the scene, it destroys any disparity in fortune."

"Quite true, but I never thought that Marianne could possibly love me. If Philippe has too much self-confidence, I may err in the other extreme. And then, I must confess, I had set my mind on travelling, and hoped to make a fresh start. Any one but myself, with a little dexterity and pushing would have made something of the opportunity which came in his way. I made no use of it. As I have told you more than once, I can never turn anything to my own advantage. It is all over now, and I am glad to be able to contribute a little to your happiness. Do not spoil our present life by reverting vainly to the past. You say that Marianne would have loved me—she must feel that I never noticed it, and will never forgive me. Now I can understand her coldness, the pains she takes to keep me at a distance, and the ceremony with which she treats me, so different from her old familiar manner. However cold or amiable a woman may be, she never pardons a man for being blind, and now that she is about to fall a prey to the clear bold eyes of a resolute unscrupulous boy, she will avenge herself on my stupidity! May she enjoy her revenge and be happy! That is all we can wish. I intend to look on with a good grace, and to be frank in approving her choice."

"You are mistaken, Pierre. If you cared for her, there is yet time, but you don't care, you don't love my poor Marianne, and she must suffer for it! You would have made her happy, as she can never be with a man so much her inferior."

"If her superiority is as great as you fancy, she will find it out betimes; she has not yet spoken the fatal word."

"You don't think her intelligent, which proves your own stupidity, if you will forgive me for saying so! I know that I cannot judge for you, and you may be right in saying I know nothing about it. I know too that it is difficult to judge of the mind of any one who refuses to show it; but when we wish to love a person, we make an effort, and when we love, we divine. If you loved—"

Pierre kissed his mother's hand with an emotion which he speedily repressed. He had been on the point of telling her how much he had been tempted to fall in love during the last few days, and that he was perhaps already vanquished. He refrained, for if he confessed his torments, his mother would share them as fully, and urge him into a struggle which he believed fruitless.

"We will talk of all this after to-morrow," said he. "First let us see how Gaucher will take. It is late now, and we must go to bed. Don't trouble yourself, be sure that I am happy enough with you to wish for nothing better."

On returning to his room, he resolved to unburden his mind, and opened the pocket-book. At the last page of his previous soliloquy, he found a little wild heartsease which he did not remember enclosing, but which set him musing. "One ought to make a collection of botanical souvenirs," said he. "A flower, a leaf, or a bit of moss assumes the virtue of a relic, if it recalls some mental

event, an emotion of the heart or an effort of the will We recollect the fatigue or peril which some botanical trophy cost us. We recall the grand or charming scenes which have been impressd on our memory; but these vestiges always evoke the drama of external nature; our mental history would play a different part—"

At this moment Pierre's attention was diverted by the sound of foot teps along the wooden corridors and staircase of his cottage; then he heard the front door open, and saw Philippe Gaucher from his window, apparently in the act of sallying forth by night to find subjects for his pencil.

CHAPTER XVI.

It was one o'clock in the morning. The conversation between Pierre and his mother, of which we have given but an abstract, had lasted more than two hours. What fancy could possess the artist to wander out of the house and garden before daybreak? André burned with sudden indignation at the idea that this yonug fool, eager to secure an independent position, was ready to compromise Marianne if he could but the more speedily and safely secure his own ends. He overtook him in a few hasty strides, as he was about to take the turning to Validat. "Where are you going?" was his abrupt question, "are you given to walking in your sleep?"

"Yes," rejoined Philippe, more surprised than vexed at being overtaken by his host, "I am walking in the sleep of love, which goes straight to its goal without

knowing the way; but I shall manage to discover my rustic beauty's manor or cot. I saw her pass this way yesterday, and you told me she lived near the road by those hills which rise on our right. The night is not dark, and the sun will be up in another hour. Don't trouble your head about me, my dear fellow, I should be sorry to alter your habits."

"The first and most important of them," returned Pirere, "is to watch over my friend's safety."

"You are realy too kind! I had rather go alone, as I told you."

"My anxiety was not about you, but about my goddaughter."

"Your goddaughter, who is she?"

"Modemoiselle Chevreuse, whom, if I understand rightly, you are about to compromise."

"Is she your goddaughter? Ah, well, that explains all. I took you for a jealous and unsuccessful suitor; but the instant I know your rights as sort of father, I hasten to vow and declare how sorry I should be to do anything that might compromise your Marianne. Know, dear friend, that my intentions are as pure as the sky above. Yesterday, my charming sweetheart declined the flower I offered her, saying that she was about to gather it for her horse, and I offered it to her horse, or rather, her mare, who is called Suzon, as you told me last night. Well, this morning I thought of scouring every grove in the country to make a splendid bouquet or garland of honeysuckle to hang on Mademoiselle Chevreuse's gate, with this modest inscription, which I carry ready written in my pocket; "To Mademoiselle Suzon, from her devoted servant." You see I am going to do nothing offensive, and your goddaughter will laugh over the little adventure."

"If your ambition is to make her laugh, I have no doubt of your success."

"You think the laugh will be at my expense. Never mind that! The point is to make her think of me, either in jest or earnest, and you will be conferring a favor on me by turning me into ridicule. I shall be easily able to take my revenge when her head has been turned by my absurdities. I mean to perpetrate no end of them, but their nature shall be such that her austere godfather will never need to remind me of the respect due to his adopted daughter."

Pierre felt ready to show him at once that his offering to Suzon was tantamount to a declaration of love to her mistress, and might give rise to a good deal of gossip, since the farm-laborers, being unable to read, and seeing this bouquet hanging on the gate, would be sure to say it was a *posy* or love-offering for their mistress; but Philippe seemed so decided, that he felt obliged to leave him to himself for fear of becoming irritated, which would have been quite absurd, and contrary to all the laws of hospitality. So Pierre professed to treat the affair as a joke and let him go, merely reminding him that his mother breakfasted at nine, and that towards noon they would start for Validat, where they were to dine at three o'clock, the usual hour in their neighborhood.

"Don't trouble yourself about me," answered Philippe, "and, above all, don't wait for me. If I go too far to be back for your breakfast-hour, I can get some bread and milk anywhere. A landscape artist is never at a loss. I have explored many a country beside your microscopic Switzerland, my good fellow!"

Pierre pretended to go in, but took a short cut across the fields towards Validat. He wished to keep an eye

on his young man, as he contemptuously designated him He gave a wild laugh of satisfaction within a quarter of an hour when he descried Philippe in the distance, pausing before the road which descended into the hollow towards Validat, and then continuing along the open road on rising ground towards the castle of Mortsang.

Philippe had looked down on the mossy tiles which roofed the farmhouse at Validat almost hidden by spreading walnuts, and showing neither wing nor turret, and had not chosen to suppose that his lady-love could occupy so humble an abode. Seeing a picturesque castle further on, he had hastened thither to deposit his offering on the gate of an aristocratic family, who knew nothing of his passion.

CHAPTER XVII.

Pierre, being resolved in any case to watch over Marianne, went into the house to fetch his stick and satchel, accessories which furnished a pretext for his accustomed walks, and without which, some surprise would have been shown at his wandering about the country. Rustics are inclined to think a man mad if he roams about without any decided object; but if he seems to be looking for something or collecting it, he is set down as a scientific man, a less dangerous reputation, unless it chance to involve some touch of sorcery.

Pierre was sufficiently acquainted with agriculture to pass for a practical man. Besides, on seeing him examine ruins, plants, and rocks, it was popularly supposed

that he was commissioned to draw up a report of the country for government. A peasant in central France can never imagine any man of independent means making such investigations for his own pleasure or profit.

The sun had risen before Pierre Andre reached the beech wood which clothed the ravine above Validat. Here, hidden by the undergrowth, he could command both the farm and every road near it. He saw the household busy, probably preparing the dinner Marianne was to give, and towards five o'clock Marianne herself appeared, going backwards and forwards and giving orders. Presently Suzon was brought, and mounting her, she turned her head towards the part of the wood traversed by the stream.

Pierre ran down the hill and reached the little ford as she came up. "Where are you going this morning?" said he, in a tone of authority which surprised her.

"Do you care to hear? I am going to the farm of Mortsang for some butter. We have not enough for dinner, and I don't like to be short of anything when you are coming to see me."

"Don't go to Mortsang yourself, Marianne, send some one; pray don't go anywhere or run about the country to-day. Stay at home and await us; by to-morrow you will know whether you are to give up your solitary rides or not."

"I don't understand you."

"Or don't choose to understand. Well, then, you must know that Phillippe Gaucher left Dolmor in the dead of night to take you a bouquet. He lost his way certainly, and took it to Mortsang or somewhere else; but if you go that way, you run the risk of meeting him."

"And supposing I did meet him?"

"Just as you choose. I have warned you. If you like to run after him—"

"No one can suppose that I am so eager to see him.'

"*He* will suppose it."

"Is he so ludicrously conceited?"

"I don't say that, you shall judge for yourself; but he has plenty of assurance, as you must know by this time."

"Yes he has certainly some assurance, but there is a wide margin between that and absurdity. Now that we are alone, tell me something about him. I will give up doing my own errands to-day, since you object to it. I will go back and say, that Suzon has fallen lame, so that I do not wish to ride her. But since we have met so opportunely, let us have a little chat."

"This is no chance meeting. I have been keeping guard."

"Over *me?* Have you really?"

"Yes, over *you.* You are entitled to my advice and protection up to the moment when you say, 'I know what this young man is, he will do for me.' That moment may perhaps be this evening or to-morrow morning. I cannot argue a long continuation of my guardianship from Philippe's way of setting to work."

"You think that it will only take me till this evening or to-morrow morning to know him? You credit me with more sagacity than I possess."

"My dear child, your pretense of stupidity is mere coquetry."

"What!" said Marianne, listening, and examining Pierre's countenance with more eagerness than usual. "Say whatever you think, help me to understand myself, for that is just what I want. Do you say that I pretend to be stupid, but am not so in reality?"

Pierre was embarrassed by this unexpected question,

put in such plain terms. "I did not come here to analyze your character," said he. "My title of godfather merely authorizes me to preserve you from wanton insults. You want me to talk to you about M. Phillippe, and seem very inquisitive about everything concerning him, though you generally show so much indifference. Well, all that I can say is that he is very enterprising, and determined to do all he can to please you."

"Does he wish to please me? Then he must like me?"

"So he says."

"But does not mean it, you think?"

"I know nothing about that; I do not wish to suppose that he is not in love with you for your own sake."

"What has he said about me? He does not know me at all. He cannot think me pretty."

"Yes, he does."

"But he does not really mean it, does he? Do tell me the truth."

While Marianne put these questions to André, her face had become animated and looked resolute and timid by turns; her color had risen and her eyes flashed and sparkled. This was a genuine transformation, and struck Pierre very much. "You must be in love wth him already," replied he, "for you look quite pretty now, and he has brought you the beauty which you never possessed before!"

"If he brings me beauty," said Marianne, growing still rosier with delight, "he has made me a grand present already, and I ought to be grateful! I always thought myself plain, and no one ever undeceived me."

"You were never plain, and I did not know that I had ever said—"

"Oh, as to you," was her prompt rejoinder, "you never looked at me to see what sort of a face I had!"

"That again is coquetry, Marianne. I always looked at you—with interest."

"Yes, just as a doctor looks at his patient; you thought I should not live. Now that you see me alive and well, you feel no further anxiety."

"And yet you see that my anxiety did not allow me to sleep last night."

"Anxiety about what? What danger could I be in from M. Philippe Gaucher? Is he not an honorable man? No one is corrupt at his age, nor am I a child, unable to resist a few soft words from a young man."

"The only danger is that of giving rise to gosssip before you have made up your mind to justify it,—you who are so afraid of what the world will say, that you decline to receive a call from me!"

"Oh, it would be much worse to have anything said about *you*. People know that you would not marry me, it is quite a different thing with a young man who is beginning life."

"What absurdities you are talking! Should not I marry you if I had been so unfortunate as to compromise you?"

"Oh yes, you would marry me from a sense of honor, and I neither wish to place you in such a dilemma, nor to feel myself obliged to accept your hand as a reparation."

André was much disturbed by every word that fell from Marianne's lips. They were both standing still, she, in the stream where Suzon wanted to drink, and he, leaning against a block of gritstone. The clear waters flowed over the sand which they seemed scarcely to wet, and the trees, shady with their new foliage, formed a soft green

canopy, through which gleamed the rosy tints of the rising sun.

"Marianne," said André thoughtfully, "you look really very pretty this morning, "and the young spark who first discovered your beauty must feel profound contempt for me, for I spoke of you with the modesty befitting a father listening to praises of his daughter. He will be sure to say—"

"Well, what am I to think?"

"You must think that a man in my position cannot regard you with the eyes of a suitor, and that he is not absurd for justifying himself. You seem to reproach me with contempt or indifference because I was blind. Why cannot you attribute it to virtue and respect?"

"I am grateful," returned Marianne with a beaming smile, "and I never felt wounded by your indifference. I care little whether I am thought pretty, so long as I am loved, and I am sure of the kind interest you have always shown in me. If M. Gaucher is not the husband to suit me, you have only to say so, and I will take your advice."

"Wait till this evening, Marianne; if you take a fancy to him, it will alter everything, and you will not consult me."

"*I* might like him, and you might not—Well, however that may be, it shall not prevent my listening to you."

"That is all nonsense, child; if he suits you, I have no right to object."

The expression on Marianne's face changed, and she seemed again to shrink fnto the frigid little person with whom Pierre was familiar. She appeared to be offended by her godfather's resignation, and, weary of attempting to stir him up, to renounce, once for all, her hopes of winning his affections.

"Since you leave me so perfectly free," said she, "I have only myself to consult. Good-by for the present."

She was about to turn her horse's head, when Pierre, yielding to a sudden impulse, seized Suzon by the bridle, exclaiming: "Stop, Marianne, you cannot part from me so coldly!"

"Well," said she, softening, "what would you have me say?"

"Some word of affectionate confidence."

"Did not I say it when I promised not to marry contrary to your wishes?"

"And don't you see that I could not accept such a sacrifice as your submission?"

"Perhaps it might be no sacrifice, who knows?"

"Who knows? Quite true! You know nothing about it yet!"

And Pierre, intimidated and discouraged at the very moment when he should have given vent to his feelings, released Suzon and bowed his head, but not before Marianne had caught sight of the tears which stood in his eyes.

CHAPTER XVIII.

"Well," said Marianne to herself as she retraced her steps, "at length I seem to see my way. I thought he would never love me! Did he not think and write that marriage was a tomb, and that he could never be satisfied with quiet unwavering happiness? And yet he

is chagrined by my hesitation ; what a strange character is his, and how doubtful he is of everything ! "

Marianne went indoors, and shut herself up in her room, suffering from such agitation as she had never before known. She was thoroughly sincere in her self-examination, and knew that she had been rather disturbed by her encounter with Philippe, and that if she followed her instincts, it would give her some gratification to see herself appreciated by this stranger.

"How easy it is to understand these decided people," thought she, "ought we not to be grateful to them for sparing us the torments of hesitation ? Pierre's respect for me is satisfactory and flattering, but does he not carry it too far ? Does he want me to make the first advances ? is it not natural for the man to take the initiative ? "

Marianne felt impelled and restrained by a true and logical propensity common to women, which leads them to esteem above all things in the stronger sex the resolution which characterizes the masculine nature. She had quivered with pleasure when Pierre seized her bridle authoritatively and detained her; but she felt that Philippe would never have relaxed his hold, and that Pierre's courage had soon failed him. And yet,—the tears he could not restrain would never have been shed by Philippe.

"Perhaps his timidity is but the natural result of my own," said Marianne to herself. "I have never said a word or given a look to betray that I wished for his love. I am too proud, he must think me indifferent or stupid. Would he love me frankly if I were more of the coquette and bolder ? Who knows ? "

Pierre, on his side, was retracing his steps to Dolmor without any further thought of watching over Philippe's

movements; the tears were trickling down his cheeks, though he was not aware of it. "I am accomplishing my destiny," said he; "now I am crowning the history of my aberrations by again longing for what is impossible. So long as Marianne remained free and appeared indifferent to me, I never troubled my head about her, but as soon as a rival, with everything in his favor, appears on the scene, I become desperately jealous. I am crazy and idiotic too, for just at the moment when I ought to speak, I feel more incapable than ever of wooing her."

He found his mother up and making breakfast, and as he preferred complaining of Marianne rather than not talking of her, he gave an account of their interview, adding: "I assure you that Marianne is a coquette and loves to tease. She tried to make me own myself in love with her, that she might enjoy this triumph before taking her revenge. To-night or to-morrow she would have laughed with her future husband at my folly. In vain Madame André tried to argue the contrary. She even went so far as to swear that he was the only man her little neighbor had ever loved, and that she had been waiting on pupose for him the last five or six years; but, as she could not quote any confidences of Marianne's in proof of her assertion, Pierre repulsed such hopes as a dangerous snare. He would not confess that he had lost his heart, and his mother, waxing impatient, ended by saying: "Well, let us make up our minds, and if we feel vexed or annoyed by this marriage, let us say that we did not choose to prevent it!"

Philippe turned up for breakfast, and did justice to the meal. He told Pierre afterwards that he had gone far astray in looking for Validat, and would have left his garland of honeysuckle on the gates of Mortsang, had he not inquired in time the name of the manor-house and

its owner, that he had gone still further and found nothing but a marshy desert of moorland, that finally, in retracing his steps, he had come upon an ugly farmhouse which he should have passed without stopping, had he not espied a pony grazing in the meadow, and recognized Mademoiselle Suzon. Plunging through thorns, he made his way into the meadow, and having hung his garland round the neck of the bony animal, had returned in trumph, considering his enterprise successful and his night well employed.

Pierre scarcely replied, but, wishing to get rid of him, advised him to go and lie down on his bed, lest the loss of his sleep should paralyze his powers of seduction. Philippe vowed that he could do without sleep for three nights and seem none the worse; nevertheless he wandered off to stretch himself in secret on the moss between some rocks, where he enjoyed a refreshing sleep till nearly noon.

As it struck twelve, the mare and chaise from Validat drove up to the gate of Dolmor. Madame André wore her puce silk dress, which looked quite fresh, though she had had it ten years. Philippe arrayed himself in a well-cut coat of black cloth, and a gorgeous necktie. André wore his ordinary Sunday suit. Madame André got into the chaise, and Marichette's husband prepared to lead the mare and walk by her side. Philippe sat beside Madame André, and professed to drive, but never succeeded in getting the animal into a trot, as a rustic brood mare is unaccustomed to that pace.

André had gone before on foot. He was the first to reach Validat, but waited for the chaise before presenting himself. The heavy vehicle, finding the barrier up, drove in slowly, and ponderously, and drew up between the house door and a manure heap. Philippe thought

LIBRARY

his future manor-house somewhat too rustic, and planned to make different arrangements if he found the premises convenient. Unfortunately, he did not; Marianne stood on the threshold of the kitchen and conducted them in, just as if they had been mere peasants. Yet she had a pretty little sanctuary of her own on the other side of the wall; but she did not feel inclined to admit a stranger there yet, and Pierre was glad to see her in no hurry to welcome her new guest.

Marianne kissed Madame André, gave her hand to her godfather, and bowed with perfect self-possession to the guest introduced; then she took Madame André into her room to lay aside her shawl and black veil. In those days the poorer women of the middle class hardly ever wore bonnets; when they went out they covered their white linen caps with a veil.

CHAPTER XIX.

Pierre was secretly amused by Philippe's discomfiture, though it was covered by his jaunty manner. He had no suspicion of the simple, nay, rude, habits of country proprietors in that part of the country at that date. Marianne appeared to have made no change in the ways in which she had been brought up. She had long had no sitting-room but this large hall with smoky rafters, hung with ropes of golden brown onions, in the centre of which was suspended, like a lustre, the lattice cage which held the cheeses. The peasantry of the district

are very tidy. If the poultry are constantly making their way to the hearth, the housewife, armed with a broom, is always on the alert to drive them out, and remove every trace of their intrusion. The bedsteads, like every piece of furniture, are polished and bright, and the pewter vessels on the dresser shine again from constant scouring; but the large beds hung with yellow serge, faded till it assumes the hue of a dead leaf, the black chimney-piece and iron chain suspended from it, the hearth covered with pots, cats, and children, the uneven cracked pavement, the small size of the single window and lowness of the ceiling hung with provisions and utensils of which you have to steer clear, all failed to satisfy the young Parisian's idea of comfort, nor could he even imagine an artist's studio in such a low dark situation.

Not being devoid of worldly wisdom in spite of his petulance, he took care not to express one word of dissatisfaction to André, but contented himself with asking if this was where they were to dine.

"I suppose so," replied Pierre. "Mademoiselle Chevreuse has indeed a little parlor of her own somewhere; but I have never been inside since she arranged it, and I have no idea whether she has a dining-room or not. I fancy she lives quite on a footing of equality with her farm-laborers, and takes her meals with them."

"And we shall sit down with them all? Well, this is charming, quite a picture of rural life."

At this moment Marichette came to say to Pierre that if the gentlemen liked to walk round the garden they would find seats, and that her mistress had no doubt gone there already with Madame André.

"The garden lies at the back of the house," added she; "but if you like to go through the young lady's

rooms, it will save you from having to go round by the buildings."

"We should prefer to go round," replied Pierre, who, with all his curiosity to see Marianne's private rooms, did not care to show them to his companion. They passed behind the farm buildings, and entered into Marianne's garden, where they found the table laid in the little covered parterre in front of the parlor. The glass door stood wide open, and without entering, for no one was there, they saw an old wainscoted room, painted white, and newly varnished. The Louis Quinze furniture assimilated with the wainscoting. The mirror, surrounded by those graceful festoons in carved wood of which we see such poor imitations now a days, appeared very old-fashioned and was considered quite out of date, especially in the country. Nevertheless it looked quaint and pretty, with its polished white garlands drooping over the clear glass, which some masses of real flowers concealed in front, so that it looked like a mere brilliant point, giving a vista into space.

Pierre racked his memory and recognized the room and furniture, which, in old M. Chevreuse's days, he had seen dirty and chipped, betraying poverty or apathy. Marianne had shown good taste in appreciating these relics of the former century and having them renovated. The floor was covered with a light carpet. There was nothing hung against the wainscoting, but splendid flowers were seen at every corner, and rose as shrubs or almost trees even upon the bracket which stood opposite the fireplace.

"How exquisite this is!" cried Philippe. "I felt sure she was artistic!"

"How could you know that?" asked Pierre, who was really the more surprised of the two.

"My dear fellow, the first glimpse of the woman tells me, without any need of definition. Marianne's type is aristocratic."

"What do you mean by the aristocratic type? I am not like you, and have not seen much of the world."

"Is that what makes you in such a caustic humor to-day?" said Philippe, laughing.

CHAPTER XX.

MARIANNE'S appearance with Madame André put an end to this dialogue. They came out into the garden, and the gentlemen hastened to join them. Pierre told his godchild, that, having been so long excluded from her sanctuary, it was quite new to him, and that he should like to see what alterations she had made in it.

"You will find none," replied she; "my father was fond of his garden, and had planted it himself; I did not like to destroy any part of it, besides, the farm people have a right to their share of the vegetables. Time has killed many of the trees, and frost cut down many of the shrubs. Wild ones have sprung up in their place, and the end of the enclosure, at the bottom of the garden, where my father tried to make a nursery, has become a wilderness."

"I should like to see it," said Pierre, "I remember how damp it was, and that I prophesied to your father that his ornamental trees would never thrive there."

"Will you go by yourself?" said Marianne; "it is rather too damp and muddy for Madame André."

Pierre crossed the orchard and plunged into the former nursery, which occupied a narrow strip of ground enclosed by very high hedges, and watered by the brook. He felt enchanted. Marianne had let nature have her own way with this tiny natural park. The grass had grown up high and bushy in some parts, short and full of flowers in others, according to the caprice of the many rills which diverged from the brook and returned to it, after idly wandering through the crevices in the soil. This light black mould, mixed with fine sand, was particularly favorable to the local flora, and all the native plants seemed to have met there. The iris and white and yellow lilies swarmed in the water. The hawthorn and elder had shot up into luxuriant trees. All the varied orchises of the country enamelled the turf, with a thousand other charming flowers, all sorts of forget-me-not ragged robin, grass of parnassus, and wild hyacinths, some white and all deliciously scented. The higher parts of the ground, being drier, had retained their covering of purple heather and creeping broom, through which peeped the starlike flowers of the wild anemone, white inside and pink beneath. There was no path; the deposits of sand served as a guide into this labyrinth, which was never entered by cattle, and frequented only by Marianne herself. Some rocks furnished a seat for her day-dreams, and some clumps of alder and slender beech-trees afforded sufficient shade without depriving the low growing vegetation of air.

"Marianne must be fond of nature," said Pierre to himself, secretly exhilarated; "she understands it and enters into it as I do! But she never says anything, never talks about it, so I never suspected it!"

"Well," said she, suddenly appearing by his side, "you see what a poor gardener I am, and how sorry you would

be to exchange your garden, which you complain of as too new, for this deserted old bog."

"I should find this old bog a perfect paradise! Are you aware that a botanist might make here almost a complete collection of our local flora? It has given me more than one surprise to find here some of the rarest species, in search of which I have often walked long distances; such as this club-rush for instance beneath our feet."

"Oh, that came from the rocks at Crevant, and has taken kindly to this spot."

"Then you have sometimes been as far as Crevant?"

"Frequently; it is a rich natural garden; I brought this pretty white hyacinth from there."

"That is not a hyacinth, but the bog-bean, a far more beautiful and uncommon flower."

"I know nothing about the names of plants, but I know their appearance and scent. Whenever I go out, I collect seeds, bulbs, or young plants, and bring them here, where nearly everything thrives."

"That explains what I see. You have created this little Eden yourself?"

"Partly; but I never boast of having acclimatized all these wild things, or people would think me mad."

"You might have confessed it to me, who share your mania."

"Oh, you! you are a scientific man, and it is quite natural for you to be interested in all these specimens. But I am ignorant, so I have no excuse."

"What excuse can you want for your love of flowers? It is all the more charming of you because you are not acquainted with the secrets of their beauty. If you were to examine them carefully—"

"Oh, I examine them, so far as that goes, and could tell you their relations and differences without knowing

one word of science. They are so beautiful and so varied! I admire the beautiful exotics you have in your garden still more, but I should never love them. These little wild flowers are more to my taste, and within my reach."

"Then you look at them as you ride along? I fancied that you saw nothing, that you enjoyed galloping on Suzon for the pleasure of the swift motion, that in fact, what you liked in the country was its freedom and space, and the exercise for its own sake."

"Yes, there is certainly a great pleasure in rapid motion, in cleaving the air, and bounding over the heather as swift as a hare; but a still greater in seeing everything as one walks along and stops before whatever one likes or admires. I enjoy both what I know and what I don't know. I want to learn nothing, and yet to know everything, or, rather I should like to know it all, and then forget it, but to be able to recall it when I choose, for there is a great deal of pleasure in making guesses, and that I should lose if I knew everything."

"Stay as you are, Marianne! I see that your nature is one of those which grasps truth without requiring demonstration, and since you are making revelations to-day just tell me—"

"Not now. I am afraid your mother will be missing me, for I left her to join you here. Let us go back to her."

CHAPTER XX.

"Will you take my arm?" said Pierre, sorry to tear himself away from the flowery oasis where Marianne had for the first time betrayed the secret of her solitary musings.

"We cannot walk two abreast," replied Marianne. "It is only a path for a single person."

"Single—but you will not be so always! I think you will soon be making a road here."

"Let us quicken our steps," said Marianne. "Here is M. Gaucher coming in search of us, and I don't want him inside my wilderness." So saying, she started at a swift run over the uneven ground, skimming it like a swallow.

"Bless you, Marianne!" was Pierre's mental rejoinder. His raptures were, however, soon dissipated, when he saw Marianne accepting the arm which Philippe offered to lead her back to Madame André. He wished she could have found some pretext for refusing it, which would not have been easy, unless she meant to play the prude, a part which she seemed to have no intention of assuming towards Gaucher.

Marianne's dress was rather striking, it was an amber mousseline-de-laine, which set off her complexion to advantage. The bright color was softened and toned down by simple ruches of very transparent tulle at the neck and arms. Her black hair was merely adorned by a yellow rose shading into pink, but her thick short locks were curled with more than usual care. Her shoes were neat, and displayed a very tiny foot, which was generally all but concealed in heavy boots, or even vulgar walnut-wood sabots. Gaucher scrutinized her with a bold curiosity which did not seem to offend her. He examined her feet, hands, and waist with the air of a satisfied connoisseur eager to express his approbation. He was quite ready to tell her that the shade of her dress was bewitching, and that her figure looked like a palm swayed by the breeze.

"My figure like a palm?" responded Marianne

lightly. "It must be a dwarf palm, a *chamærops* then? Don't you think so?" said she, addressing her godfather.

"What, are you a botanist?" exclaimed Philippe naïvely.

"No, indeed. But M. Pierre has a palm of that sort growing in a box, and I remembered its name."

"But you must be fond of flowers, for your vases and baskets are marvels of taste."

"They are only wild flowers from our fields and hedgerows. I like them better out of doors than in my little parlor; but it is not often that I have the pleasure of welcoming Madame André here, and as the ancients offered victims to their tutelary gods, so I sacrifice the lovely plants to my dear friend."

"I don't see one bit of honeysuckle," said Philippe, who had followed Marianne into the sitting-room where Madame André was resting.

"Suzon might have given us a bit of hers," returned Marianne; "but the necklace fretted her, so she rolled over with it, and you may imagine its condition after that. There was nothing left but the inscription, about which she did not trouble herself, as she cannot read."

"Why do you laugh, Monsieur André?" said Philippe, to Pierre. "I have accomplished my object—"

"What was your object?" asked Marianne.

"Why, I wanted to show you that I was thinking of you even before daybreak. Now you know it, and I am satisfied."

"And what made you think of me so early?"

"Must I tell you?"

"You seem to expect me to ask."

"How can I reply here in the presence of witnesses?"

"You made no secret of saying that I had been the subject of your thoughts. It does not do to commence

any speech aloud that has to end in a whisper, it is better to leave it alone."

"In other words, I had better have held my tongue?"

"I did not say that; I want to know what you thought of me this morning. It must have been something pleasant, since you paid Suzon such attentions."

"I thought you were charming and graceful enough to turn any man's head."

"Thank you, sir. You dispense your compliments with the urbanity of a sovereign. Must I acknowledge them by a courtesy?"

"If you please, Mademoiselle Marianne."

"Then here it is, Monsieur Philippe," replied she, making a low mock courtesy very gracefully.

Pierre looked at her in amazement. He had never supposed she could be so animated and coquettish. Philippe, growing bolder, began to pay her still more marked attentions, charmed by her banter, and thinking, as any one else in his place might have done, that she was delighted with his admiration.

CHAPTER XXII.

Dinner was served under the vines and jessamine, which covered the verandah with long festoons, and hung down their tendrils over the heads of the guests. The table was enlivened with old china, of no great value in those days, though it would be now, and its bright colors, standing out on a bluish ground, looked gay and pretty. Marianne had brought out some old Nevers

glass, put out of sight as old-fashioned, by her parents, but sure to be admired by a collector. Philippe was artist enough to appreciate at least the quaintness of these pretty objects, and omitted no opportunity of praising both the general effect and every detail of the service. His appetite was good, for Marichette, under her mistress' direction, was an excellent cook, and the simplest food was converted into dainty dishes under her hands. Old M. Chevreuse had left some bottles of capital wine in his cellar, and Marianne had taken care of it. In short, she showed as much coquetry in her dinner as in her dress and manner. Philippe, who had not much faith in the part he was playing of an unexpected guest, was not slow to believe that he was getting on famously, and would find no difficulty in winning the lady's hand and fortune.

The wine seemed to have got into his head, at any rate he became very tender over dessert. Pierre's attempts to restrain him by criticism or contradiction, did but excite him the more; and Madame André teased him openly, in hopes of making him look ridiculous. Marianne was so skilful in encouraging him to confidence and expansion that he augured well for his cause, and on rising from table, after a perfect volley of compliments, some of which were pretty well turned, and others in rather bad taste, Philippe seized Marianne by the arm, saying that he wished to see the big oxen and fat sheep, for a landscape artist knew more about cattle than the farmers.

"I don't agree with you," said Marianne, withdrawing her arm; "you pretend to appreciate everything better than we do, whether in town or country, because you are an artist by profession; but it seems to me that your calling spoils everything and hinders you from seeing." Then, in reply to Philippe's remonstrances, she resumed

"You see too much, and you do not see things aright; you try to express what is inexpressible. The beautiful is like the Deity, its existence is all-sufficient and no hymns or songs of praise can add one iota to its glory. Words, verses, pictures, and whatever may be invented to embellish the truth tend only to diminish the feeling it inspires when we gaze on it without any thought of trying to express it."

"What are you saying there?" exclaimed Philippe. "Are you opposed to art? A systematic Philistine? Such words from your lips are as bad as a caterpillar on a rose!"

"There you are caught," said Marianne promptly, "for a caterpillar on a rose is a lovely object, those that live on our rose-trees are a fine and glossy and emerald green. You can never have examined a caterpillar, artist as you are. Some of them are marvels of beauty, and I know of none that are ugly. How are you to look at my big oxen, when you cannot even look at such a tiny creature?"

"Is it you the naturalist, who have persuaded your goddaughter that the love of nature is killed by art?" asked Philippe of André. "If so, you have taught her a pretty paradox."

"It seems to figure as such in your discussion," returned André, "and your proposition is quite as much of a paradox as Marianne's. I think it would be easier to discuss the question if the argument were better stated."

"Pray state it properly," said Marianne.

"Well, this is the shape it would assume with me," replied Pierre, addressing Gaucher. "You think that we require knowledge to enable us to see things, and this I grant; a naturalist sees more than the peasant, but

art differs from science, and we must feel things before we can give them expression. This is what Marianne means. She thinks that you have not loved and studied nature sufficiently to render it. Pray observe that she has not seen any of your paintings any more than I myself, so it is not your talent that she is criticizing, but your theory, which sounds rather presumptuous as coming from such a youngster. She thinks that the way does not lie through the studio into the country, but from the country into the studio; in other words we do not learn to see by becoming artists, but we become artists by learning to use our eyes. Was not that what you meant, Marianne?"

"Exactly," she replied; "then you agree with me?"

"Let us go and look at the live stock," exclaimed Phillipe, "you are far too clever for me!"

"Well, we will go and see the animals," replied Marianne.—"Won't you come too!" said she to her godfather, adding in a low voice: "I shall go with you as far as the stables, and then come back to play the game with your mother"

"We will follow you," returned Pierre.

He did not follow, however, but returned to the parlor with Madame André, saying: "let us leave them to come to an understanding. The time for Marianne's decision is arrived. She has brought it on by her confidences. He will sum up all the declarations he has been making over the dinner-table. If Marianne likes him, it is useless to give any advice, we have only to accept the facts."

"Madame André felt uneasy, and did not like Pierre's leaving the young couple together. She pressed him to follow Marianne, and he promised to obey, but went off

by himself into the little wilderness, where, a few hours before, he had felt happy and sanguine for a moment. This was all over now and the life marred by excessive bashfulness rose up before him as a bitter irony, when contrasted with the rapid triumph of a youngster, whose sole merit consisted possibly inhis self-confidence.

After an hour's dejection, he returned to his mother, whom he found discussing household matters with Marichette, as she helped her to replace the old china and pretty glass behind the panels of the sitting room. "Well," said she, as she took Pierre's arm and led him out into the garden, "are you come back alone?"

"I don't know what has become of them," answered Pierre. "I thought I should find them here." They walked round under the trellis of vines, but saw nothing of them. "You know now," said Pierre, "that there must be something decisive in this lengthy tete-a-tete."

"No, they must still be-going round the farm. Do go and join them!"

"I don't wish to play the spy, and if they are taking a sentimental walk through the beech-wood, I should not like to draw the attention of the farm-people by looking for Marianne."

They came back to the parlor which Marichette had vacated, and waited another quarter of an hour. Madame André felt vexed and anxious. Pierre sat in silent dejection.

At length Marianne entered alone, slightly agitated, though smiling. "Forgive me for being such a bad hostess, dear friend," said she, kissing Madame André, "I have been very remiss in doing the honors of my house, but the fault is yours. Why did you bring me such an enterprising guest?"

"Enterprising?" repeated Pierre with bitter irony.

"Yes, indeed! He expects me to fall in love within three hours, and promise to marry him. Rather a summary way of proceeding, you will allow."

"Not too summary, if he has succeeded in getting you to make up your mind."

"I have made up my mind," said Marianne.

"Then you have come to announce your engagement," said Pierre, dolefully. "Why is he not here to proclaim his triumph?"

"Oh, he is modest about his triumph, and has left us."

"Has he gone back by himself to Dolmor?"

"No; he is going back to Paris."

"To buy the wedding presents?" said Madame André.

"He will soon be buying them for some Parisian, I have no doubt," replied Marianne, "for he vows he has had enough of country girls."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MADAME ANDRE started to her feet, exclaiming: "Then it is all at an end!"

Marianne looked at Pierre who had been unable to restrain a cry of joy. "Are you glad?" asked she.

"Not if you regret it!"

"I regret nothing. All he had in his favor was his audacity, which impressed me at first. I felt that with a man of such decision I should be spared all trouble in

thinking for myself, which would have been very convenient; but if a man never hesitates, he ought to have excellent judgment, and as soon as he began to talk, I saw that, however clever and kind-hearted he might be, he had very little sense. What would become of such a poor weak creature as myself, if I had a husband without brains? It would never do, and since he pressed me to say what I thought of him, I gave him my opinion as frankly as I have just done to you."

"Tell us how it all came about," said Madame André. "To begin with, where were you? Did he make his offer in the cowshed?"

"No, in the meadow, on the further side of the grove. I wonder you did not hear us, for we had a good deal of argument during our walk. As to any declaration of his sentiments, that took place in your presence, under the influence of the muscat, and there was no need to repeat it. He began at once to talk of marriage; but I had made up my mind, and told him at once that I had no intention of marrying and then he became angry. He can be ill-tempered enough if you thwart him. He reproached me with being a village coquette, for flirting with him the whole of dinner time. He even went so far as to say some hard things, and I took it meekly, for I deserved them. It is quite true that I flirted, and I cannot disown it, but my coquetry was not displayed on his account, and as I could not confess my secret, I chose to let him think what he liked of me."

"Then for whom was your coquetry displayed?" asked Madame Andre.

"For one who refuses to guess anything that he is not told. One must have M. Philippe's self-confidence to come to an understanding with him. I tried to have it, and only required the excitement of his praise to give

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me the courage I had always lacked; but now my instructor has gone, and I begin to ask myself whether he really thought me pretty or intelligent, for all my old doubts are returning!"

"Marianne, Marianne," cried Pierre, throwing himself on his knees before his goddaughter, "if you have guessed my feelings in spite of my roughness, you will pardon it, for I have done penance enough to-day.

"I have to ask for pardon too," returned Marianne. I read what you wrote down in your pocket-book. It slipped from your hand two days ago, upon the little grassy path, as you were talking to me of M. Gaucher, and I found it as I walked back. Thinking it was an album full of sketches, such as you often make when you walk out, I opened it, and saw my own name. And then—well, I read it, I read it all, and in the evening I brought back the book and laid it on your drawing-room table, by the side of your satchel, without saying a word. There you have my offence. I knew then that you doubted my affection, and regretted that you could not count upon it. I wanted to see whether you would be jealous of my suitor, so I made myself agreeable, and now—"

"Now," cried Madame Andre, "he will be happy, for, in spite of all his endeavors, I guessed his reasons for abusing himself so much!"

"But I am quite unworthy of you, Marianne," said Pierre, shrinking again; "you are adorable, and I am—"

"Never mind what you think of yourself," returned Marianne briskly; "you have said everything you could imagine in my presence to discourage me from loving you, but all in vain. I have loved you for six years. I never thought when it first began, that it would be so long before you returned. I kept expecting you with the rustic patience which we learn in our childhood, but your

return was a disappointment, for I saw that you were determined not to fall in love, and, but for the pocket-book, I should have thought all was over. Finding that, in spite of all your efforts, you could not help thinking of me, I took courage, and then, this morning—I saw the tears in your eyes. Come now, let us own that we love each other, and could never be happy apart."

"*That* we never could," replied Pierre Andre, "for never were two people more alike. We are both timid and reserved, yet we have the same frank rectitude. We have the same tastes, with the same aversion to making them public, but feel the need of communicating them to one another and enjoying them together. We adore nature and love the country; while separated, our enjoyment of them was melancholy, now it will be rapture! But what we have both felt the want of most has been mutual love and sympathy, unbounded confidence in another being who is our second self. At forty, I offer you a virgin heart that has been bestowed only on visions. Accept it as your own, for its past, present, and future shall centre in you."

It was night before Pierre and his mother left Validat Madame André wished to walk part of the way; then she got into the chaise and left them to follow, feeling that they must wish to be alone, and Marianne, having the carriage to take her back, walked on to Dolmor, leaning on the arm of her godfather, whom she had again begun to address as Pierre.

"What a lovely evening!" said he, as they looked up to the stars. "How fresh the air is, and how balmy! The very earth and rocks seem to smell sweet to-night! I never saw the stars look so clear before, we seem to be passing through an enchanted land, that has sprung up without our knowing it, since morning. Ah! if I had

been as happy as this in my youth I should have become a great poet and artist."

"Thank heaven you did not," replied Marianne, "or my inferiority would seem all the greater to you, for I know nothing of all these fine things; but I fancy I love nature all the more from being unable to express my feelings. M. Philippe horrified me to-day by the queer pedantic words he used to qualify all that he saw. No, words cannot express one's feelings, and it seems to me that the more people say, the less they see. Nature must be like love, Pierre. It dwells in our hearts, and it don't do for us to talk about it, for it grows weaker by description. When I dream, I don't know what comes over me but I see nothing but heaven and myself. And now I put myself out of the question, for if I think of you, I am absorbed by you, and forget my own existence. You are my happiness, my poetry, and my science."

After Marianne had driven off in her chaise and Pierre had gone indoors he found the following note awaiting him from Philippe,—

"My dear Andre:

I have called in at your house for my luggage, and leave a line behind to thank you for your kind reception. If your pretty little neighbor made fun of me, the fault was not yours, but my own; I ought to have opened my eyes wider and become sooner aware of her preference for you, a preference which she could not altogether conceal though she never avowed it. I might have spared myself the annoyance of having been in love with her for three or four hours, but love is no killing matter, and I remain her friend as well as yours, for she

is a charming woman, and I congratulate you on your good fortune."

The day following, Pierre André and Marianne Chevreuse had their banns published

THE END.

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